

AT THE MERCY OF THE STATE

BY BERNIE BABCOCK

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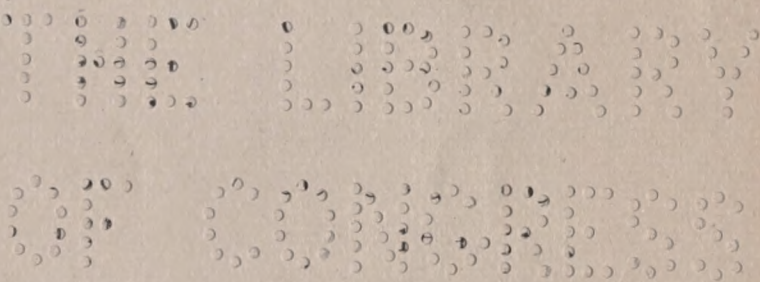
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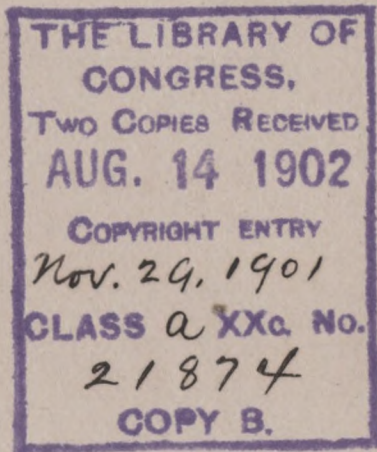
Author of "The Daughter of a Republican," "The Martyr."
"Justice to the Woman," Etc.

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At the Mercy of the State.

CHAPTER I.

Less than a score of years ago, two children played in a sunny meadow that stretched itself peacefully behind two homes in the quiet village of Maple Crossing.

From the adjoining garden fences the meadow sloped gently until it reached a tiny stream that wound its way in and out among the grasses, finally creeping under the farther fence and disappearing beneath a tangle of sumac and cattails.

To the imagination of the children this meadow, ruffled into tiny green billows by the summer breeze, was a stretch of boundless prairie; the tiny stream a mighty river, and the marshy spot where it lost itself underneath the tangle, that undefined region that lies on the borderland of all childish imagination — the place of mystery, for this spot lay beyond their farthest explorations and from its thickets creatures innumerable piped and piped in an unknown language, alive, unseen, always mysterious.

When the first spring rains filled the narrow banks of the stream, the children stood hand in hand far back from its edge and timidly threw twigs into what seemed to them a roaring torrent.

When the water had settled to a gentle motion and purled softly over the tree roots, the children sailed boats, wading after them, the boy never becoming so interested in the boat or its cargo as to

forget that he was a little older, a little taller, and a little stronger than his companion, and that he was taking care of her.

Later, when the stream had crept sluggishly under the fence, leaving only silent pools and muddy spots, the children made tracks in the soft, flat places, and here, as before, the boy thought always first of his little companion, finding places where the mud was softest for her to leave the prints of her chubby feet.

And when the soft mud had baked and lay with its parched surface split into myriads of hungry cracks, the children left the dry bed of the stream and sat under the trees weaving clover chains and watching the white clouds that were to them giant swans sporting lazily on the far, blue fields of the summer sky.

Thus the children played, realizing for a brief time the truth that all men are created equal.

But though the two were ignorant of social castes and chasms, made and emphasized by morals and by money, they themselves belonged each to a family representing opposites.

Deacon Grey, the father of the little girl, was a thrifty merchant, owning the one widely patronized store in Maple Crossing. He was orthodox and patriotic to the core, holding to his creed and his political party with fervid devotion. Indeed, so well grounded was he both in matters of religion and of politics that he had been often referred to by irreverent younger persons as "Deacon Flint and Iron." His three sons were models of youthful excellence. His wife knew her place—and kept it. His little daughter Nellie was the pet of the Sunday school. His horses were well fed and tended, and his house the best appointed and most neatly kept in the village.

As if by way of contrast, Doctor Russell, the father of the boy, lived in the adjoining home. Be-

ing commonly known as a drunkard—or so nearly one that the fine distinction was overlooked—he was not expected to be either religious or patriotic. The days had been when his prospects were good, when he drank less and attended more to business, when his wife's white fingers glistened with rings which looked well against the ruby wine glass that she tipped to his when drinking his health before her marriage. But those days had gone, and with them the prospects and the rings. These latter days the wife earned the bread with a needle, and the home, from the front gate hanging sideways to the lean horse in the rickety barn, mutely gave evidence of the condition of affairs that exists when the head of a household saps his manhood and squanders his money for liquor.

Even in the early days of the lives of the two children, the difference in their appearance and the care they received did not pass unnoticed except by the children themselves, for while the girl was always carefully dressed, the boy wore clothing often patched, often too small, and sometimes soiled; and while they played in the meadow, many times a woman's voice was heard calling from the garden fence, "Nellie, Nellie," until the child answered back that she was all right. Sometimes, when the children had been gone an unusually long time, the other mother left her sewing long enough to go to the fence and call "Horace," but these times were rare. She must work, or the boy would have nothing to eat.

But Nellie never noticed that the boy's clothing was different from hers. She only knew that his eyes were large and honest; that his hand was larger than hers and kept her many times from falling; that he was brave because he was not afraid of spiders; that he was kind because he did not rob birds' nests, and that he was always happy.

And so the days passed, drawing them nearer to



“HEY, PATCHES, WHERE’S YOUR SHOES?”

that time when childhood’s blissful dream was to be rudely broken, and the day of the disillusion was a day to which, in their ignorance, the two had looked forward with eager anticipation—the first day of school.

For days before the great event Horace had talked it over with Nellie, and together they had wondered and had planned, and together, when at

last the long looked for day had arrived, they walked proudly to the school house, he carrying her book and slate.

Scarcely had they entered the school yard, however, when his proud young heart was stabbed by the rude shouts of half a dozen boys.

"Hey, Patches, where's your shoes?" called one pointing at his bare feet.

"Trying to swipe Nellie Grey's book? Give it to her, smart Aleck!" yelled another.

"He's come to school to be a doctor — like his daddy," a third added.

"You can't play with us, Mr. Drunkard's boy, if you do walk with Nellie Grey," still another cried, tauntingly.

A rush of hot blood flooded the boy's pale cheeks as he paused before his tormentors, but so stunned was he by the suddenness of their cruelty, so innocent of the reason of what seemed to him sheer malice, that he could frame no word of reply.

But Nellie stepped between him and the other boys.

"You naughty, wicked things!" she said, stamping her foot. "I hate you every one — I hate you!" and turning to Horace she caught him quickly by the hand and led the way to the school room saying coaxingly, "We don't care, do we?"

But the pleasure that the boy had dreamed of for weeks had died when he had expected it to be born. In its place was the acute pain that comes to the heart of a sensitive child when it must first be taunted for a parent's sin.

Hurrying from the school house at the close of the longest day of his young life, Horace ran home, where he crept into the stable loft and, hidden close under the low eaves, cried some of his sorrow and humiliation away.

His thoughts were childish and broken, but one thing he realized, and that was that the boys knew

that his father was not like other fathers and in some way blamed him for it, and he had fully determined that he would never, so long as he lived, go to school again, when he heard Nellie calling him.

He hesitated. In a vague way he felt that he had done her an injustice in walking to school with her, for he remembered now that her apron had been very smooth and white and her shoes shiny.

Still she called: "Horace! Horace!" stopping after each call to listen for an answer.

Finally, after giving his eyes a last savage wipe, he climbed from the loft and went to the apple tree where he knew she was waiting.

"Has your father whipped you?" she inquired, looking steadily at his red rimmed eyes.

"No — but I'm not going to school any more," he said resolutely.

"Not going to school?" she exclaimed. "I thought you wanted to go awful, awful bad!"

"I do, I do — but — but —," and his voice quavered.

"I know," she said. "It's those wicked boys, but don't mind them. They are great big fools or they'd have more sense, and I do want you to walk with me."

"But they'll make fun of you, too."

"And do I care?" she answered proudly. "I'd rather have you like me than all of them put together. I don't want them to like me."

"But Nellie — Nellie —" and his voice trembled; "they have found out that my father — that my father —"

"It is awful to drink whisky," she interrupted, with great emphasis, "and my father prays like sixty for the Lord to come down and 'destroy' all the whisky in the country, but you don't drink whisky, Horace!"

The boy drew a long sigh.

"I wish," he said slowly, "that my father could

be locked up in some place — not a jail — for a long, long time, some place where he could not get whisky. Then he'd stop drinking, 'cause he couldn't get it, and when he came out he wouldn't spend his money — he wouldn't be a drunkard."

"Shucks," said Nellie. "What do you want him shut up for? You'd better wish the whisky was shut up; but you don't drink it and you must go to school."

"Why must I?"

"Because I've got to go and because — because I want you to. Please, Horace," and she lifted her eyes to his face for an answer.

He considered the matter thoughtfully, she meantime watching his face closely.

Presently she said, with a smile: "You're going, Horace."

"Yes, sir," he said emphatically. "And do you know what for? I'm going to turn those boys down and stand at the head of the class all winter—I am, Nellie,—I'm going to get to the head and stay there."

"Of course you are," she answered with enthusiasm, "I'll let you turn me down tomorrow!"

"You needn't mind 'letting' me. I'll get to the top all right!" and the boy's dark eyes danced with pleasure in anticipation of the victory he expected to win.

CHAPTER II.

A PROSPERITY SUPPER.

That same day that Horace Russel awoke to the fact that he was, in the eyes of Maple Crossing's juvenile society, branded in some way because of his father's sin, there was born in his young heart a determination to force a recognition of superiority from his environment that the same environment seemed bent on denying him, and every taunt but strengthened this determination.

His sturdy efforts were rewarded. He did get to the head of his class and there he stayed until, after repeated interruptions, he was finally taken from school and hired out by his father as a chore boy.

His disappointment at being compelled to leave school was keen, but adversity proved a spur to his unusual will; Nellie supplied him with cast off books, the long hours of the night furnished the time; and with his whole soul thrown into the endeavor, he struggled to wrest himself from the power of the fates that, it seemed to him, had conspired to keep him under.

The years that changed Horace Russel from a light-hearted, laughing little boy into a quiet-mannered youth, brought other changes also. Deacon Grey had become more flinty — more assured of the infallibility of his religious creed and political theory. The three exemplary sons of this respectable father had left the old home and were in a distant city attending college. The gentle mother who had stood beside the garden fence calling "Nellie," had gone where her voice was heard no more; and

Nellie had lengthened her skirts and coiled her hair after the manner of a young lady.

Dr. Russel still drank at intervals and was worthless at all times. Mrs. Russel, pale and patient, still toiled with her needle, and the years had left another child in the dilapidated home, a frail, patient, blue-eyed child called Dot.

Meantime religion and politics still interested Maple Crossing inhabitants — especially politics; and politicians who had made speeches before the last election had repeatedly assured the sturdy farmers who attended their meetings that, if they would cast their votes for a certain political party, a great era of prosperity would reward them. And now, to prove the truth of their statements, the very fields and vineyards around Maple Crossing seemed to be exerting themselves. This especially pleased Deacon Grey, for he, being an ardent partizan, had used his utmost effort to elect a prosperity party, and an honest man — particularly a deacon — likes to see his statements proved.

With prosperity on every hand, it seemed that it might have showered its blessings where they were most sadly needed, but not so. A hundred thousand homes were heartlessly passed and one of them was the Russel home. As their fare is typical, let us see them at their supper on a night when the family were all in, but the father.

When supper was announced, Dot was the first at the table, eagerly scanning the scanty food supply with her blue eyes.

“Ain’t we going to have nothing but mush?” she said with evident disappointment. “I’m tired of mush!”

There was no answer to her remarks, and she took up her spoon and began to stir the mush in her bowl.

“Have we got any milk?” she inquired.

"No milk, Dottie," her mother answered, "but there's plenty of sugar."

"Sugar is good, little Dot," Horace said cheerfully, dusting his mush.

Dot watched him, and when he had finished, she slowly sprinkled her portion and began to eat, but the mouthfuls were slowly swallowed as if a lump were in her throat.

"I believe I'm nearly choked," she said plaintively. "I don't like mush!" and her voice trembled.

Her mother placed a cup of water by her plate, and, without a word, the child lifted it eagerly to her lips; but though she made repeated efforts, the mush would not go down, and she presently left the table and went to play with her kittens.

Scarcely had the mush plates been taken from the table, when the barking of a dog in the yard announced the arrival of the man of the house, who presently entered carrying two parcels, one of which he handed his wife with an order to fix him some supper.

At first sight of the parcels, Dot let the kitten go. With eager eyes she followed the motion of her mother's hands as they unfolded the brown paper and brought to light a small cut of steak; and when the savory odor of the broiling meat began to fill the close room, the child stood close by the stove and inhaled it hungrily.

When the meat had been cooked, Mrs. Russel put it on a plate and placed it near Doctor Russel, who sat at the table and who took from the remaining parcel two rolls and two doughnuts, which he set by the edge of his plate.

Dot watched the operation with feverish interest, and when the doughnuts came to light she took an involuntary step forward, checking her motion suddenly as her father lifted his eyes.

The man of the house then cut the steak, deliberately putting a bit into his mouth with a bite of

bread, chewing with intense satisfaction and swallowing each mouthful slowly.

The child stood by with wistful eyes. She watched the morsels of meat as they were cut; she followed the upward movement of the fork, and before it had been lowered to the plate her eyes had already dropped and were watching for the delicious sight of the prongs stabbing the juicy morsel. Meantime she twisted her thin little fingers nervously, making motions as if she, too, were grasping a fork handle.

The eager light in her blue eyes was the light of hope, for she expected a little would be left for her. But the light paled as, bit by bit, the meat disappeared, until nothing but a little gravy remained, and even this her father wiped up with a fragment of roll, leaving the plate as clean as when it had been put before him.

After the steak came the doughnuts, and when the first of these was taken up Dot again took a quick step toward the table, her eyes riveted on the food and her fingers working convulsively.

"What are you staring at?" Doctor Russel exclaimed gruffly, suddenly looking up.

"Nothing!" she said, shrinking back.

"You've had your supper, get away from here!" he ordered; and with a look of mingled terror and disappointment Dot crept in behind the stove where the kitten lay.

Horace had seen it all. Not a motion of the child had escaped him, not a glance of her pleading eye; and so great was his indignation that it was with an effort he kept from springing upon his father and wrenching the doughnut from his hand. When he saw Dot rise from her corner a few moments later and leave the room he followed her.

Not finding her in the adjoining room he went out-of-doors, calling her name softly, as he walked slowly toward the apple tree under which she most often played.

The night air was heavy and still, and hardly had he stepped under the boughs of the tree when he heard some one softly sobbing.

Turning toward the spot, he found little Dot lying in the damp grass, and crying out her sorrow into the breast of a heartless earth.

"Poor little girl!" he said tenderly, lifting her in his arms. "Don't cry!" and he wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"But I'm hungry—just as hungry as I can be. I think I'm nearly starved!"

"No, no, not nearly starved, Dot. You saw the doughnuts, and you like doughnuts, you know."

"Yes, I do!" she exclaimed eagerly. "And I like meat—I love it, and I like bread. If I had just a little bit—why don't we have good things to eat? Deacon Grey's cats have more good things to eat than we have. They have milk and scraps of meat. I wish they'd give me some of it. One day I was going to steal some of their cat's dinner, but I was afraid the cook would see me. Do you think—do you think, Horace," and she lowered her voice—"do you think if I'd ask the cook, real nice, and say 'Please, ma'am,' she'd give me some of the cat's scraps to-morrow?"

"O Dot, for goodness' sake, don't do that!" the boy exclaimed. "That would be awful. We mustn't beg, if we are disgracefully poor. Deacon Grey would feed us, if we asked him, but we will not. We will never get hungry enough to beg."

"I'm that hungry now," Dot exclaimed, and dropping her head against her brother's shoulder she sobbed pitifully.

Horace rested his head against hers, and, trusting to her soft hair to hide his tears, let them drop, for though he was in a way accustomed to like occurrences, Dot's grief wrung his heart.

For a few moments nothing was heard save the child's sobs, then Horace said in his usual cheerful

way: 'Listen, Dottie—we are going to have lots of good things to eat in just a little while. I am learning now to be a telegraph operator. In a few weeks more I will have work—better work than helping tend horses and doing milking. Then I will have money enough every month to get whatever you want to eat.'

"Goody!" exclaimed Dot. "How long will it be?"

"Not much longer, and if I had not stopped so often to pick grapes and do a hundred other things it would be now. But we can wait a little longer—just a little!"

"Of course!" she said. "Tell me something else nice so I won't think of meat and doughnuts."

"Something still nicer. Some day—some happy day, if I keep studying, I will be a doctor, and then——"

Dot gave a sudden jump, exclaiming imploringly, "O, don't!"

"Why, Dottie?"

"Because doctors eat up everything," she answered quickly.

In spite of his indignation Horace laughed.

"Not all of them do, Dottie," he said. "I will be a doctor who will divide. I will earn a great deal of money, and you shall have a piano like Nellie's, and our tired mother shall have a pony and a carriage."

"How nice! How nice!" the child cried, for a moment enthused, but she sighed almost immediately, saying, "But it's so far away."

A moment they sat in silence, then the little girl lifted her face to her brother's.

"Horace—Horace!" she whispered.

"What, Dottie?" he asked kindly.

"I'm—hungry," and turning her face to his shoulder, she sobbed again.

Horace held her two nervous hands in his, and

told her many stories of the good days that were to come, and gradually her sobs hushed. Her head sank lower on his shoulder. Her restless hands grew quiet.

Very carefully the brother straightened her in his arms so that he might not awaken her to the sorrows that a drunkard's child early learns, and slowly he carried her to the house.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

While Horace Russel was by a most unusual effort procuring for himself, by a slow and overtaxing process, the education his father's inability kept him from acquiring in the ordinary way, Nellie Grey was fitting herself for life by easy methods, her father and three older brothers vying with one another in rendering her assistance.

She had finished the village school with honors and had been sent to a distant educational center for a three years' course, two years of which had been completed.

Nellie's progress gave Horace much pleasure, and though their pathways, now that they were grown, seemed to be widely apart, she retained the same place in his heart, and always in his visions of the future there was a happy place, somewhere ahead, where the diverging pathways would meet again.

When she arrived home after her first year away at school Nellie went almost at once to the apple tree by the division fence that had all their lives been the meeting place of the two, and called for Horace, who hurried to meet her, happy to find that the same gentle, unaffected Nellie who went away had returned.

When she left home a second time Horace sat on the fence and waited until she came to say goodby.

When she returned at the close of the second year, she returned unspoiled and winsome as she had gone away, and now that the time had come for her

to go away a third time, Horace sat under the tree waiting for a last short visit with her.

It was evening time, and, as the shadows gathered, his mind went back to the days when he and Nellie had traveled the same paths and the joy of living had been in common, unfretted with such cares as he had learned must come with life.

So intent was he with his thoughts that he did not notice the approach of anyone, until a hand was laid lightly on his arm and he recognized Nellie's touch.

Immediately he dropped to the ground and stood beside her.

"Nellie," he said, looking down on her, "you are shrinking every year. When we stood here last year I was only half a head taller than you, now the tip of your hair is even with my chin."

Nellie laughed. "I was just thinking that you must be almost grown," she said.

"It's nice to have you shrink so, Nellie. It makes me think of the days when we played in the meadow. How I wish we could shrink back—both of us—just for a little time to those days. How large the meadow was, how mighty the stream, how blue the sky, how green the grass, and how much like stars the dandelions were. Do you ever think of those days? Do you ever wish we could go back, just for a day or an hour?"

"Let's not talk about the meadow, Horace," she said, softly. "It will make us homesick, and we must not feel a bit sad on this last night. Let us keep the meadow days in our memory as the sunny, fragrant, holy time, lived but once, and then press on to other happy days to come."

"Then tell me once again of your plans," he said. "You have nearly finished your school days now."

"You know my plans as well as I. I want to be a nurse, but my father will not let me. I want to be a doctor, but my father says women have no business

meddling with matters which concern men alone, so I must be a teacher and teach young males how to 'meddle.' When I get my diploma I will attend some normal school for a short time and then, I suppose, settle down to a life of teaching young ideas how to shoot."

"And will you always teach?" he inquired.

"That's too far ahead to decide. But tell me now your plans, for I love to hear you talk, and I will be away nine long months."

"Do you think my plans are really worth anything—I mean do you think I will carry them out as I plan?"

"Carry out your plans? Certainly you will. The boy who has achieved what you have, against such odds as you have contended with, can do anything on earth he wills to. You never think of giving up, do you?"

"No, no, not for a minute — when I think — but sometimes I am almost too tired to think. If I had not already overcome so many obstacles I might be tempted to give up, there seem such insurmountable barriers yet in my way."

"Ah, but Horace!" the girl said with enthusiasm, "Think what you have done! Not a boy in a hundred — no, not one in a thousand would have grit enough to do as you have. You are only two years behind me now, and since the day you were twelve, when have you gone to school three months at a time? When your father stopped you to pick grapes I cried because you lost your place at the head of the class, and each succeeding time he kept you out, for days or weeks, to earn a few dollars, I cried, until finally he stopped you entirely and hired you out to old man Barnes. My, but I was angry then! You were never intended to be anybody's hired man! And here you stand now almost up with me. O, but I'm proud of you, Horace! You are a brave boy

and there is no environment in the world to keep you down!"

"No, Nellie," he said quietly, "there is not, and though my efforts at obtaining an education have been broken into a thousand fragments, I am getting along, but it's all because you help me with your sympathy and your books."

"Pshaw, Horace! It's no such thing. You would get along anyway. I'm only glad that I can help a little in the making of a man — such a man as you will some day be"

"You help me more than you know," he answered almost reverently, "but I think things will be a bit easier after awhile. You see I'll soon be ready to take station work now. I don't especially like telegraphy, but it's a stepping-stone, you know. My first work will be night work, and through the lonesome hours I can study — how I can study."

"Go on with your plans," she suggested after a pause.

Horace laughed.

"You know my plans by heart, Nellie. You know that some day, some happy day, I will be a surgeon. You know that I expect my ship to come in; you know that I dream of a reputation; you know that I am certain I can bring this all to pass. All I need is time"

"Certainly you can — and what then?"

"What then? Ah, then will come again such days as we lived in the meadow lot; days indistinct yet, but full of the mystery of life; days that must be happy — that is, if you are with me. When you make your plans, Nellie, am I always in them, I wonder, as you are in mine? You are always in every happy dream I dream."

"I have never pictured any happy future without you," she answered.

"I wonder why you put me in," he inquired.

"O, because — because I have always —" and she hesitated.

"Don't say you have always 'liked' me," he interrupted. "It pleased me to hear you say that when we were children, but now that we are older and I am stronger, I want a stronger word. Say another word, Nellie, something that means infinitely more."

It was still under the apple tree, the hush broken only by a dew drop that slipped from a leaf to a lower bough.

"Horace," Nellie said, resting her cheek against his shoulder, "I cannot help it if I love you and there can be no harm in saying so, for I do love you."

"Say it again, Nellie!" he said quickly. "It is sweeter than any song I ever heard you sing."

"There is no use of saying it," she said frankly. "You know it — you have always known it. I could not hide it from you if I tried."

"And you love me well enough to wait until I have completed this long hard course I am taking — until that day when our paths may come together in a way that no man nor force of circumstances can ever part?"

"But think how old I'll be, if I wait so many years. A young and dashing surgeon with a reputation will not want an old maid for a wife."

"I'll never be young, Nellie — never any more, and I'll never be dashing. Besides, years do not make age. I am years and years older than you are now. By the time I am twenty-five, I will have crowded the toil and experience of thirty-five into my life, and you will yet be only twenty-four. Can you promise to trust me so long?"

"Trust you, Horace Russel!" she exclaimed. "If all the world stood on one side and said you would not succeed, I would say: 'You do not know the



SAY ANOTHER WORD, NELLIE.

boy,' and I would trust you. I will promise you—but, Horace, have you thought of my father?"

"What of your father? Will he say 'No?'"

"I am sure he will, for he thinks—he fears—"

"Yes, yes, I know, he fears I will make such a doctor as my father has. What right has he to think this of me? What right has the world to hold me down, as if I were to blame? Let your father live and learn. I have determined to be a man, and I will be. I only need your trust and your love!"

"And you shall have both until my dying day, for no force of circumstances can compete with a man's will, and you have the will of two."

Horace caught her hand eagerly and raised it to his lips, holding it long.

"God bless you, Nellie—little Nellie?" he said after the short hush.

A few moments longer they stood together in the deep shadows of the low-hanging branches.

Then she raised her face to his.

"Kiss me good night, Horace, and be good when I am gone." And a moment later Horace stood alone.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE OF THE MANY THOUSAND.

After Nellie's third visit Horace turned more than ever of his vital force into the steady effort required to make his vision of the future a reality. The promise she had given him was his constant inspiration, and even the work of lighting switch-lights and sweeping out the station seemed suddenly to have been lifted to an important plane. He found that he was able to sit yet a little later, after working hours, poring over the books that Nellie sent him, and though ever so weary her words of confidence spurred him on to more strenuous endeavors.

Thus busily engaged the weeks passed rapidly that changed late summer into fall.

The fertile fields surrounding Maple Crossing had yielded a rich harvest. Barns were being filled to bursting and cellars crowded with an abundance of winter store.

But in the home of Doctor Russel no hint of this prosperity came.

The pale-faced mother still stitched and stitched continually, with half numb fingers and an aching back, and the same beggarly portions of cheap food comprised the daily bills of fare.

Doctor Russel, drunk and sober by turns, occasionally got a call to pull a tooth, and at long intervals some of the poorer class in the river district employed him professionally, but none of his family ever expected anything from these rare calls. The greater portion of his small income went into one of

the many saloons of Adkins, a city twelve miles from Maple Crossing and the nearest point where saloons kept open doors. What part of his scanty earnings did not go in that way went to feed the doctor's horse, which, by its looks, received an infinitesimally small portion.

About two miles from Maple Crossing the road leading to Adkins crosses a narrow stream, on one side of which the banks rise abruptly, and the road at this point, owing to the peculiar geological construction of the banks of the stream, is called the "wash bank" road.

Approaching the bridge on one side the road slopes gently, but on the other it winds around the side of a steep hill, under the beetling banks that keep it shadowy and always slippery with moisture.

At this place the greatest care is exercised by drivers of vehicles, as a sudden lurch would mean a plunge down the steep hillside.

As often as Doctor Russel left his home in his two-wheeled cart, known to the villagers as the "jumper," his wife thought of this bend in the road.

Summoned to the river district to attend a poverty-stricken Swede laborer, early one November morning, Doctor Russel set out in his rickety vehicle, stopping only to whip back his hound which seemed determined to follow him, and which finally did track the jumper and disappear with his nose close to the road leading toward the river.

As it was about time for her husband to make a trip to Adkins and come home intoxicated, Mrs. Russel was not surprised that he was not home by supper time, but as he had not appeared when Horace came home some time later she was fully persuaded that he had done as she had always been sure he would do—driven off the wash bank road at the bend.

Before Horace had finished his frugal supper the whining of a dog outside attracted his attention, and

when he opened the door the hound entered the room, still whining.

At sight of the dog, a strange, wild light that Horace always dreaded to see in his mother's eye, suddenly shone.

"Horace," she said, in an unnatural tone, "your father has run off the wash bank road. I know it just as well as if I saw him. I always knew he would."

It was in vain that Horace tried to persuade her that his father might have been detained by his patient's condition, or that he might be in Adkins, too intoxicated to attempt the trip home.

She insisted that he had driven over the bend, and was, perhaps, at that moment lying dead in the scraggy growth somewhere down the hillside.

Horace himself, though assuming indifference to his mother's fears, was not satisfied that all was well, and determined to go over to the wash banks and learn for himself.

It was a densely dark night and the wind moaned through the leafless trees like the struggling breathing of some great living thing.

"What will you do if you find your father?" his mother inquired anxiously, as he lighted a lantern. "You can do nothing alone."

Horace sat down a moment to think.

"I will take the dog with me," he said presently. "If I find father in trouble, I will write a note and send it back in the dog's collar and you can send help."

"The dog will not go."

Horace smiled. "The dog will do as I wish," he said. "Watch for the dog," and he started out into the black night.

As Mrs. Russel had supposed, the dog objected seriously to another tramp over the wet, dark road, and it was only by means of a rope that Horace succeeded in forcing his brute companion to accom-

pany him as he picked his way along by the light of the lantern.

Once out of the village into the open country, the darkness became a trifle less dense, but when he reached the gorge between the wash banks, it was like entering a grave, so silent was it, so pitchy black, and so heavy with the damp of the sodden earth and the decaying leaves that lined the hillside and filled the hollows.

The depressing influence of some uncanny spirit seemed to have possession of the spot, and though he had intended to call at once, Horace hesitated to break the stillness, dreading to hear his own voice.

Crossing the bridge he ascended the opposite hill in silence.

Arriving at the spot nearest the danger point, he held his lantern to the ground and looked for wheel tracks.

There they were, plainly cut in the thin layer of earth that overspread the roadway, and turning directly over the edge of the hill.

Someone had gone over. Who more likely than his father?

Stepping to the edge of what seemed in the darkness of the night a fathomless pit, he spoke his father's name, to be answered only by the mocking echo of his own voice.

But after repeated calls, he imagined that he heard a groan, coming from somewhere below.

The way down this ragged hill side was intricate in daylight and was doubly dangerous in the inky darkness with only the uncertain light of the lantern and Horace hesitated.

But while he stood, a second faint groan reached his ear.

Hastily tying the dog to a tree, he began to descend, pressing his heels well into the slippery leaves. Again and again he called his father's name, paus-

ing from time to time for an answer that did not come.

After staggering against wet boughs, tumbling over rotten logs and coming in contact with sharp stones for some minutes, he paused in the gloom, half-determined to give up the search, when a third time the faint groan reached him, this time from some point not far away.

Turning his lantern in all directions and peering into the pale light it cast, he finally caught sight of an object that seemed to be a human being wedged against a fallen tree, and hurrying to the spot he found this to be his father.

After speaking to him many times and receiving no answer, he hung his lantern on a bough and began to straighten the twisted figure.

At his first touch the faint groan sounded, but when he laid hands on the man's legs, attempting to straighten them, a wild, unearthly scream sounded.

"My God!" My God!" the voice rang out in agony. "Kill me—kill me—cut my throat—I can't stand it—let me die!" and the shriek ended in a long groan.

As the echo of the fearful cry came quavering back on the night air, Horace felt for a moment that murder was being committed and that he was the murderer.

He trembled violently, and a cold perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

"Father, father!" he said, his teeth chattering under the nervous strain. "It's I—It's Horace—don't you know me? I've come to help you home."

But his questioning was useless. After the outburst nothing escaped the man's lips but the occasional groan that had at first sounded, and Horace dared not try again to move him.

Taking the lantern from the tree he placed it on the mouldy ground and, crouching over it, with trembling fingers wrote a hurried message to his



“ IT’S I — IT’S HORACE — DON’T YOU KNOW ME? ”

mother, and climbing to the roadway fastened the note to the dog's collar.

No words were necessary to send the dog speeding homeward, and when the last faint echo of his rapidly retreating flight had died on the heavy air Horace went back into the black valley to watch beside one of the many thousand whose lives go out from the deadly influence of drink.

CHAPTER V.

THE BORDERLAND OF HAPPINESS.

For a few days after his fall over the Wash Bank Doctor Russel lay in the County Hospital, his wants attended by the public.

His wife asked permission to be with him, for she had been assured that he could not recover from his frightful fall; but her request was denied, the authorities consoling her with the promise that she should be sent for when the end came.

While the family waited in the home out of which the father had gone, never to return, an air of heavy suspense seemed to have settled over the hearts of Horace and his mother, keeping them both unusually silent; but Dot seemed to have come into sudden possession of a fund of good feeling. She talked to her mother and brother incessantly, and finding them too much preoccupied with thoughts of their own to pay any attention to her opinions, she turned her attention to the kitten, asking many questions which she answered to suit herself, and always on the supposition that her father would never return.

But to Horace the thought that his father might not return presented at this time no comforting thought.

It is true that since his early childhood his father's practice of drinking had been a continual mortification to him, but he had borne the taunts of other boys bravely, feeling that in a way his trouble was none of their business so long as he asked nothing of them.

Now, however, his private trouble had been increased by the added humiliation of dependence.

His father was dying alone and friendless, cared for by the public, and none knew better than Horace that the public would also bury him.

The very thought of this brought to fresh life the pain that had cut his heart on the morning, years before, when he had gone to school with Nellie. The knowledge that he could not buy a piece of ground in the Maple Crossing Cemetery, that he could not pay a man to dig a grave, that he could not pay for a coffin, that he could not buy a last decent suit of clothes for his father, that his mother must stand beside an open grave without the customary black veil to hide her face from the rude stares of those about, made him so utterly miserable that he was almost unable to attend his work, and yet on this work, menial though it was, depended in a measure his future.

When word was brought to the wife and children of Doctor Russel that they might come to him, it was not until the last breath had left his pain-racked body, and the three were advised to hurry if they wished to be present at the burial.

Deacon Grey kindly lent Horace his carry-all, and with his pride humbled to the dust, the boy drove his mother and little sister to the County Hospital in the suburbs of Adkins.

The interment was hastily accomplished, the grave rapidly filled and rounded up, and the bunch of golden rod that Mrs. Russel had stopped in the woods along the way to gather was placed on the bare mound. Then the widow and the two children turned their faces toward home again.

As they rounded the bend where the fatal plunge had been taken, Horace led the horse slowly while his mother gazed silently down the shaded steep.

Far down in a thicket some bits of broken vehicle told where the old "jumper" had been wrecked, but

the log against which the man had been thrown was not visible, and Horace did not point it out nor did Mrs. Russel ask any questions.

With her eyes fixed on the farthest limits of the passing woods and fields, her mind wandered to the remote past, the expression on her face changing slightly from time to time as marked by degrees of sadness.

But if Mrs. Russel was unusually quiet Dot was unusually talkative.

"Why don't mother talk?" she questioned of her brother.

"People do not feel like talking when they have been to a funeral."

"I do," she replied emphatically.

"You have no father now, Dottie," Horace answered gravely.

"I'm glad of it," she said. "I wouldn't give a cent for a bushel of fathers. I haven't had a bit good time for years and years, and I never had half enough to eat. I'll get his share now, won't I?" and she brought her lips together with evident pleasure.

Horace looked grave for a few seconds, then he laughed. It was the first time he had laughed since the night on the wash bank, and it lifted a load from his mind.

"You are a heathen, Dottie," he exclaimed. "Every girl needs a father."

"What for?" she inquired with interest.

"What do girls need a father for? Why, to take care of them."

"Well, then you can be my father. I'd like one like you. You don't look at me with your great big eyes as if you meant to bite me, and you wouldn't eat up everything when I'm starving for a bite—would you, Horace?"

Attracted by the child's questioning Mrs. Russel's eyes lost their far-away expression, and she assumed an interest in the conversation.

"Yes, Dottie," she answered, "Horace is the man of the house now. We are beginning afresh. Let us not talk of the past any more. Let us forget. I can work yet a little longer, and when I am ready to stop Horace will be able to take my place."

"How I wish it might be to-morrow!" he exclaimed. "But it will be soon I am sure. The night man at Trentwood was fired last week for getting drunk and letting a train pass, and an extra has been there since. Some level-headed fellow will get a good place there—how I wish I might be the man. Forty dollars a month! Can you imagine it, Dottie?"

"What will it buy?" she questioned gravely.

"More of everything nice than we have ever had. Steak and milk, cake and chicken Sundays and paint and boards to fix the house."

"I don't care for paint and boards," she said, elevating her nose. "You can't eat paint and boards. I want gravy and doughnuts."

"All right, gravy and doughnuts you shall have every day, and our mother shall never sew another shirt or pair of overalls."

Mrs. Russel looked lovingly into the enthusiastic face of her son, and her eyes filled with tears.

"You are a generous-hearted, brave boy," she said, "and you will yet bring joy and happiness into my life—I am sure of it. But, Horace," she said, her lips trembling, "make me one promise. Promise me that you will take your father's example as a solemn warning. Promise me that you will never drink! Sometimes I feel that your father's blood is upon my hands, for once, long ago, I drank with him. I laughed at those who had never tasted wine and were afraid to sip champagne. And yet I am not all to blame, for years since I put wine forever from my house and begged your father not to touch it. He promised, and together we signed the pledge, and we came to Maple Crossing to get a fresh start.

For months he kept his pledge, for months we seemed to have started once again on the road to happiness, but it all came to an end the first time he went to Adkins, for there he found saloons on every corner. How different it had been if he had not found the open saloon. But all that is past now—only you are left. Promise me, Horace!”

“I have fully determined, mother, that I will never drink.”

“That is good—so good—but, Horace——”

“What, mother?”

“Many men have determined.”

“Have you forgotten my will?” he inquired almost proudly.

“No, no; your will power is the marvel of my life, but, Horace, your father once had such a will. Whisky——” and she leaned near him and whispered hoarsely, “whisky saps the will—it burns it out—it drowns it—it stifles it—it smothers it. Whisky digs the grave of a man’s will, strangles the victim, throws him in and tramps over the grave of a lost hope with fiendish glee. Whisky——”

Horace drew his hand gently across his mother’s arm, and his motion seemed to calm her, for she had grown excited.

“I give you my solemn promise, mother, and I wish I could repeat it for you pleasure a thousand times: I will never be a drunkard. A surgeon must have a clear brain and the steadiest nerve on earth, and a surgeon I will be though the heavens fall. Do not be afraid. What I will to do I do. What I have determined to leave undone must, so far as I am concerned, forever remain undone. The worst is past. Smooth sailing will soon be here now.”

Hardly had the Russels entered the house on their return, when the aged station agent of Maple Crossing came, bringing Horace a telegraphic message.

With trembling fingers the boy opened it and

read the magic words: "Report at Trentwood to-night for duty."

Then for the first time he forgot that he had just come from his father's funeral; he forgot that as man of the house he should possess dignity, and with a shout of joy he threw his arms around his mother's waist and danced her around the room until her hair pins fell from her hair and she laughed with joy.

"We have reached the borderland of happiness!" he exclaimed; and the tears that shone in her eyes was her only answer to his speech.

CHAPTER VI.

A PARTNERSHIP BOY TRAP.

The great commonwealth of which Maple Crossing is an insignificant portion is one of the proudest and most progressive in the sisterhood of states and is patriotic to the core.

The national emblem of liberty and justice floats over her turrets and spires, and the time honored truth about "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" is unfailingly proclaimed on all patriotic occasions.

But while the state is thus declaring the immutable rights of her citizens and seemingly contending for the welfare of the weak and the protection of all in their pursuit of happiness, she is at the same time as incessantly making agreements with that curse of civilization which causes more disaster to the human race than war, famine and pestilence, whereby the curse may devastate and destroy and damn, to the utmost limit of its power; and even while the Russels were rejoicing because they had reached the borderline of happiness, the state was entering into such an agreement with a representative of the curse known as Jacob Crane.

Jacob Crane, the party of the first part, with the consent and protection of the state, the party of the second part, was preparing a trap to be set directly across the street from the station in Trentwood, where Horace Russel was to be employed as night man.

The agreement entered into by the curse and the state was a cold-blooded, business transaction,

the state selling the right to the curse to set and bait and tend the trap known as the saloon, and making provisions to care for such victims as should be maimed or crazed or killed in this same trap.

Having purchased from the state the right to operate the trap, Jacob Crane obtained, also from the state, a certificate calculated to protect him in his vocation of debauching manhood, and was ready for business.

When the citizens of Trentwood first heard that Jacob Crane intended to start a saloon in their town a wave of indignation swept the place, and a meeting was held at which some resolutions were adopted.

But Jacob Crane, having served several years as bartender in a swell saloon in Adkins, a city that makes resolutions of exceedingly war-like proportions the year around, was not seriously alarmed at the outbreak of resolutions in Trentwood. He knew when he turned his greedy eye on the little town that its citizens wanted electric lights and a water plant. He knew how big the license fee would seem to the city fathers. He knew, as well before as after the grand stand flurry made by preachers and pious laymen, that they would sooner see a saloon in Trentwood than an opposing political party in power, and he rightly gauged their patriotism.

The place he had chosen to operate his trap had been selected with an eye single to business, for it was on a corner where four roads crossed, and, as if it had been selected with especial reference to railroad employes, it was most conveniently near the railroad station.

For a time after Jacob Crane began to prepare his trap feeling ran high in Trentwood, but when the business men saw how bright and fresh the corner appeared after it had been artistically decorated and fitted up they were inclined to believe that after all the evils of a single saloon might have been exaggerated.

Jacob Crane had studied his business well. Boys and men being his especial prey he laid his snares accordingly. A piano was put into the bar room and a musician of Trentwood hired to play popular airs, and, as if this were not enough, the wily manager of "Crane's Place" sent to his old haunt in Adkins once in a while and had a couple of young women come to Trentwood to sing a bit and do some fancy dancing. This latter attraction proved a drawing card, though Jacob Crane was careful not to have any announcement of the visits of these women published in the Trentwood Times.

When the saloon had been completed Jacob Crane gave a house warming, at which free beer was served and to which every man in Trentwood was cordially invited.

The ladies from Adkins were not present on this occasion, but the piano furnished gay music, beer flowed freely and the affair was voted by all present a big success.

The opening of this trap managed by Crane and allowed by the state took place after Horace Russel had been working five weeks in Trentwood.

When the young operator had received his first month's pay he took it to his mother just as it had been handed him from the pay car, and great was the rejoicing in the barren home. The mother fingered the crisp, green bills lovingly, and later, with a basket on his arm and Dot's little hand in his, Horace went to the store and bought such an array of good things as had not been seen in the Russel home in the recollection of the child. The evening meal was like a banquet.

Dot was almost overcome by the amount of steak and doughnuts given out as her share, and began dividing it in portions, setting one aside for the next day and one the day after, until assured by Horace that there was no need to put any away.

When finally impressed that she might eat as

much as she would, she was almost wild with joy and partook of such a meal as she had not dreamed of in her happiest visions.

To Horace his position in the world seemed suddenly changed. He was now independent. He was called one of the best of the young operators, and his chances of promotion were good. But this promotion, when it should come, would only be a higher stepping stone.

But the long months of extra exertion had at length begun to tell upon him. Often he found himself so restless and nervous that it became necessary to walk the platform in the night air.

When he first heard that a saloon was to be opened right across the corner from the station by a man from Adkins, he was indignant, for with his whole soul he hated the very name of Adkins.

But having heard much of the place during the weeks while it was being decorated and fitted up, he determined to see for himself what an up-to-date saloon was like.

There was in the office with him a student who often stayed evenings for practice, and, leaving him in charge for a few minutes the evening of the opening, Horace crossed the street to "Crane's Place."

The piano was rattling merrily; laughter sounded, and even on the outside air the scent of liquor hung.

This scent Horace drew in, in long satisfied draughts and the effect was pleasant.

Inside he met several boy acquaintances and a number of men whom he knew. One of these men was the day operator, who slapped him familiarly on the shoulder and asked him to drink to the new enterprise in a glass of fresh beer. With hand still pressing on the boy's shoulder, the man pushed him toward the bar.

Horace Russel had never tasted beer, but he was not afraid of a drink popularly supposed to be so harmless, and a second glass soon followed the first.

This visit was followed by another and yet another, at intervals of several days, and each time the foolishly confident young man drank beer, and each time his relish of the drink was keener.

He would not have admitted this fact even to himself and would have scorned the idea that he was "drinking;" but, alas, he was a boy, a stranger in the town, and the saloon the only place where he was sure of a social welcome.

Then, one night, his friend, the day operator suggested a glass of "something stronger."

This time Horace hesitated.

It had been that "something stronger" that had cursed his life.

Still he felt that he was strong, and the certainty that he would never be a drunkard almost caused him to smile at his own fears. Besides, the day operator was one of the best men on the road, had never been known to be intoxicated, had shown Horace many favors, and the young operator did not want to seem strange or discourteous, so he took the proffered glass and drained it.

As it poured down his throat it burned in passing, but the effect was almost instantaneous. To the very outmost fiber of his finger tips the liquid seemed to bound, giving him such a sense of exhilaration as he had never known, and he felt that some unknown craving had for the first time in his life been satisfied.

Almost immediately he called for a second glass, and under the effects of this his spirits rose, until when a fresh song was started he joined merrily in the chorus, beating rapid time with his feet.

But scarcely had he begun when some one took him roughly by the arm, exclaiming wrathfully, "You fool!" and Horace recognized the voice of the day operator.

"You cursed fool! Don't you know you're on duty? What sort of a kid are you that you cannot

“drink a cocktail and keep your head?” his friend cursed in his ear, meantime leading him hurriedly from the fume-laden room, back across the street.

On the station platform the older man tried by a free use of strong language to impress upon the youth that his “job” would not last a day if the company learned that he had been drunk.

Somewhat sobered by the cool air and vigorous remarks of his friend, Horace hurried to the office with unsteady step and set to work to counteract the effects of the liquor by bathing his head many times in cold water and pacing the long platform in the fresh air.

Still it was almost more than he could do to keep from falling asleep at his post of duty, and the last new book that Nellie had sent him remained for that night unopened on his desk.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PREY OF THE STATE'S TRAP

When the first effects of his visit to Crane's had worn away and Horace Russel found himself in possession of his senses, he shuddered to think what might have happened had not the friendly day operator forced him away from the saloon, and in a vague way he seemed by the act of that night to have stepped under the shadow of the power that lay behind the saloons of Adkins. But the walk from the station in Maple Crossing to his home and a warm welcome from his mother dispelled his vague uneasiness, and after a hurried breakfast he went to his room to sleep himself back to his normal condition.

After his first visit to Crane's place, Horace determined that a second risk should not be encountered, and for a few weeks he bent all his energies on his studies and employment, making long strides toward the happy future that seemed certainly, though slowly, drawing nearer.

But after a few weeks of close attention to his business, he was attracted one evening by sounds of unusual merriment across the way. Brilliant lights streamed over the mirrored screens which were continually swinging in and out, as boys and men entered the place, and above the din of voices the music of the piano rose and fell as the performer executed a popular air in furious time.

For a while the boy withstood the temptation to see what was going on, and might have succeeded had not a boy friend happened along and urged him

to go over "for ten minutes" and see the show. Unfortunately the student was in the office, and Horace listened to his friend's persuasion, promising himself that he would under no circumstances touch a drop of liquor.

As he and his friend passed between the swinging screens, the attraction immediately presented itself; surrounded by a circle of admiring men and boys, two women scantily attired were executing a rather irregular dance.

Horace, who had never before witnessed such a performance, was at first too greatly surprised to enter into the spirit of the occasion, but the fumes of running liquor hung heavy on the air, and almost before he was aware of his action he had turned to the bar and called for a drink of the liquor that had affected him so pleasantly on his former visit.

As before the liquor burned its way down his tender throat, immediately afterward setting his whole nervous anatomy in an intoxicated whirl.

After the first glass a second followed, and, there being no friendly hand to draw him away this time, a third glass followed the second.

By the time Horace had released the third glass from his hand he was wildly happy with the effects of the liquor, and when the women began a second dance he, with a number of Trentwood boys, joined in the motion, growing more and more hilarious until Jacob Crane found it necessary to interfere, calling the attention of Horace to the fact that he had better go across the street and attend to his business.

The boy was almost too much intoxicated to understand, but on being repeatedly ordered out of the place, he staggered across the street.

With a dim experience of relief, he found on reaching the office that the student was still on duty, and, dropping across a table, he slept heavily until

the first grey streaks of morning tinged the sky, when the student awoke him.

"Time to get up?" he inquired, stupidly opening his eyes. Then seeing the student he straightened up.

"You'd better brace up," the boy remarked crossly. "The day man will be here in another hour, and away goes your position when the chief hears of this."

These words were all that was necessary.

Horace sprang up, and with trembling hands dashed cold water into his feverish face, and walked up and down the platform in the crisp morning air. Just before broad daylight he was able to take his place at the desk, though his hands trembled so he could not have sent a message, and the roaring in his head made it impossible for him to distinguish one call from another.

"Don't give me away this time," he pleaded as the student prepared to go home.

"I'm not that kind," the student assured him. "But, Russel, you're a fool!"

"I know it," Horace answered wearily, "but this is the last time!" and by the ring of decision in his voice and the firm pressure of his thin lips the student, as well as the young operator, considered the matter finally settled.

But the deadly, insidious power of the liquor sold by the partnership concern of the state and Jacob Crane was already sapping the boy's energy, and a third fall was easier than the second.

* * * * *

While Horace Russel was playing fast and loose with his position as a result of the influence of "Crane's Place," the pious members of the old square church in Maple Crossing were having trouble of a more respectable nature.

Several months had elapsed since this church had

had a regular pastor, and sermons during the interval had been few and far between and delivered mostly by students from a theological school in Adkins.

After several weeks without even a student it was announced by Deacon Grey that a minister would preach the following Sunday, and would be, if the sermon suited, called to the pastorate of Maple Crossing.

The news spread rapidly, and by the Friday preceding the eventful Sunday everybody within a radius of three miles was in readiness to attend.

The new minister arrived Saturday afternoon. He was entertained at the house of Deacon Grey, who told him much of Maple Crossing history, including that of his neighbors, the Russels. In this connection he spoke of the indignity heaped on the citizens of Trentwood by the satanic Jacob Crane in the opening of his saloon.

The young minister, the Rev. William Bruce, had received a call once before to a probable pastorate, and had preached a burning sermon against the legalized saloon in such a way as to forever quench his hope of being established in the pastorate of that church—so he had been informed—and on this occasion he had tried to be wiser, and had prepared for his trial sermon a scholarly essay on "Abraham's Faith." This he was looking over for the last time, just before retiring Saturday night, when from a distance a succession of sharp cries reached his ear.

Stepping toward the window he listened.

Again they came, nearer and sharper, cutting the air like a knife, this time blended with the rapid echoes of flying horse hoofs.

Pushing the curtain aside William Bruce leaned over the casement, peering down the moonlit road, and almost immediately there dashed into view a vehicle in which were seated two boys, one of whom leaned forward lashing the horse fearfully, while



'A WOMAN STOOD AT THE GATE OF THE MISERABLE COTTAGE.'

with every blow the other youth emitted terrific screams.

Like a flash of darkness the vehicle passed, and as it did so another cry sounded on the stillness of the night.

It was a woman's voice, and she cried in a voice tuned to the unspeakable sorrow of a broken heart: "Horace! Horace!" Turning to the place from which the call had proceeded the minister noticed that a woman stood at the gate of the miserable cottage next door, and that, as the vehicle passed without heeding her cry, she placed her hands over her ears as if to shut out the sound of the reiterated screams that came quivering back on the night air.

William Bruce stood for a moment at the open window as the tragedy sank its effects into his soul.

The screams had grown still in the distance. The long silent street lay peacefully in the moonlight, but the minister knew that the peace was only a surface expression. The saloon that had cursed Adkins had reached even to this quiet place, and under the calm of nature, hearts were breaking, homes were wrecking, men were rushing to hell.

Turning back to the table at which he had been sitting, he dropped his carefully prepared essay.

"Lie there, Abraham," he said, "and God forbid that I hold my tongue. Maple Crossing must hear the message, even though I never get a pastorate—so help me God." He dropped upon his knees and his soul reached out for help to the God of eternal justice.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SERMON EXTRAORDINARY

At the Sunday morning service, when William Bruce preached his trial sermon, the church was filled, everybody hoping that the new minister would preach such a sermon as would win the hearts of the church deacons, especially the flinty heart of Deacon Grey.

The young clergyman's appearance was the occasion for many a critical glance, and the congregation waited with an air of expectancy to hear what manner of voice he possessed. His appearance was satisfactory, and his voice as he read the opening hymn was pleasant, even musical. These important matters being settled, the pious people of Maple Crossing settled themselves with their ears open for the real test.

"Brethren and Sisters of Maple Crossing," the young minister said before reading his text, "as I walked, last evening, from the station to the hospitable home where I am being entertained, my eye drank in with pleasure the calm beauty of your peaceful little town, and its quietude and hush were like balm to one who has lived in the jangle and discord of city life. Surrounded by your fertile fields that stretch away, seemingly boundless, and shut in by your stately trees, you seem to be remote from many dangers that beset our modern civilized life—especially that greatest curse, the legalized liquor traffic.

"Enjoying the calm and peace of your village, as a man enjoys the sweet things of a dream, my dream

was suddenly broken last midnight as the still air of Maple Crossing was pierced by the screams of a maniac, such a maniac as the state by its active partner, the saloon, is engaged in making. As the screams quivered and throbbed on the air, I knew that indeed the curse had reached its octopus arms even into the midst of your calm, and when I heard a mother's voice calling in agony to a boy that is going his swift way to destruction, as surely as he passed her, I was keenly awake to the fact that no place, however sheltered, however humble, however holy, escapes the pitiless, soundless, hellish greed of the curse that buys from the state the right to blight and blast, to debauch and damn the defenseless ones whom the state should protect.

"Because I have found the curse to have fastened its deadly fangs even in your fair little town, because I have learned that the sons of your fathers are traveling the road to perdition, because I have learned that the hearts of your mothers are bleeding and breaking and being trampled in the dust, I am going to talk to you to-day from this scripture."

A death-like silence prevailed, and lifting his Bible the preacher read:

"For among my people are found wicked men; they lay wait as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. They are waxen fat, they shine; yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked. They judge not the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper and the right of the needy they do not judge. Shall not I visit for these things? saith the Lord. Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and a horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

"The words of my text," said the young preacher, "are these: 'A wonderful and a horrible

thing is committed in the land and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

As the minister placed his Bible on the desk, an audible breath escaped the lips of the congregation and they leaned forward to hear a new sermon from a new text.

"We have for so many years heard such varied and terrible things of the legalized liquor traffic," he began slowly, "that our brains have grown stupid with the repetition, and the horrors of the frightful conditions brought about by it, under sanction of the law, fail to arouse in us that fierce wrath that once thoroughly aroused means the death of the whole hellish business. Let us for a few moments try to grasp the horror of this monster iniquity of the age.

"There is in a certain great industrial center a covered passageway that leads from the fresh air of a world teeming with life to the well ordered chambers of a certain and foreordained death. Over this covered wooden bridge, from early morning until the sun drops behind the roofs and smoke stacks in the west, the clatter of feet sounds, as by the hundred and the thousand creatures are driven to their doom; and from the death chamber the shrieks of these animals blend in one prolonged death wail, from morning until evening, as they are swung onto the wheel that turns them swiftly into the hands of the master slaughterer who plunges his two-edged knife deep into each throbbing, gasping throat that comes within his reach.

"In that place blood is on every side, on every hand, under every foot, staining every board and dripping from every knife. Blood and screams and struggles—and stiff death.

"But these are only animals. Let us picture another sight. Let us put boys where we have seen swine stand—boys with bright eyes, pure hearts, fond hopes, immortal souls.



"THERE IS ANOTHER BRIDGE, UNSEEN BUT REAL."

"There is another bridge—unseen but real, and built of days and months and years, braced with opportunities, girt with hopes and breathed upon by mothers' prayers. This is the bridge of life and over it the boys of a nation are making their way. Need I tell you that these boys — by the thousand, from morning until sunset and even through the night, are leaving the open fields of purity and the fresh air of hope and traveling their certain way to the pauper's grave and the drunkard's hell, and that the two-edged knife that stabs this vast array of manhood, that pierces the heart and bleeds the soul, is held in the hands of a legalized traffic, and that the master slaughterer of the age, the saloon, holds and wields its weapon by consent of the sovereign states?

"Every fifteen minutes, from sunset until sunrise, a murder is committed in our land, and half of this number are easily due to the legalized liquor traffic. Every ten minutes that I stand before you the legalized saloon robs some man or child or woman of his immortal soul and sinks him deep into the abyss of everlasting woe.

"Is it horrible?

"Horrible with such black horror that no pen or tongue can write its horror or describe its pangs!

"Let us see if it is wonderful.

"The state, the sovereign state, proud, mighty, invincible, declares herself the protector of the defenseless ones,—the mothers, the infants. But the state, the sovereign state, sells the right to that master slaughterer, the saloon, to wield his two-edged knife of sure destruction. For a stipulated sum she gives this arch foe of the human race the right to wreck and ruin, to coax the endless procession of boys over the bridge into his deadly places, there to deal them certain death. The state, that should protect the weak, sells to the strong the legal right to deal out death, and flings her citizens, to fight or

die, into the teeth of a traffic with a heart of iron and with fangs of brass. Is it not wonderful to see the state in partnership with this breeder of vice, this debaucher of purity, this father of poverty, this mother of lust, this certain ally of damnation?

"I say to you to-day that the mothers of a nation are at the mercy of the state that as yet seems not to know what mercy is. The manhood of the nation is at the mercy of the state. The happiness of your daughters is at the mercy of the state. The welfare of your sons is at the mercy of the state. The destiny of your unborn children is at the mercy the state. The boy who screamed and raved upon your streets last night is at the mercy of the state. His broken-hearted mother is at the mercy of the state—and you, men of Maple Crossing, go to make the state.

"The butcher of our modern civilization procured the right to use his deadly weapon from the state. It is your place and mine to wrench this weapon from his hand. It is your place and mine to meet this deadliest enemy of the home, the church and the human soul, at the ballot box, for there only can we wound him.

"And what will be the end thereof?

"The end of sin is death. Individual sin brings individual death. National sin ends in national death. The saloon is the great social anarchist of the age. It defies every law. It laughs at every prayer. It is the main source of corruption in politics, and by so much as it corrupts politics it dominates there. If it shall be allowed to walk roughshod over opinion and defy every law it chooses to defy, the spirit of anarchy it begets will grow and flourish, until human life will scarce be worth the counting. Men in high places will be struck down like dogs, and public institutions will be but tools used by the traffic to manufacture spoils.

"The time will come when from under every

stone on every highway, when from under every clod on every byway the voice of a brother's blood will call to Almighty God for vengeance, until He will in justice wipe out the nation that mocks Him by its abominations. The time will come when every passing breeze that blows will be heavy laden with the increasing wails of cursed men and broken-hearted women—when every passing summer breath will be burdened by the voices of men dead and damned. The time will come when the nation that sows the wind of unrighteousness, will in the end reap the whirlwind of desolation.

“Men of Maple Crossing, what have you done to keep the saloon with all its damning powers from fastening itself into the heart of your neighboring town? What are you doing to keep it from entering your own fair town, should it so choose? Will you wait until the whetted knife has been struck into the heart of some son or daughter of Maple Crossing? Will you wait until the blood of some one of your own children spatters on your own hands before you act? Will you wait until some one, or many of the immortal souls of Maple Crossing join the ranks of the drunkard in hell before you act the Christian's part?

“God forbid. But we are at the mercy of the state, and we are the state.”

Hymn and benediction brought the service to a close, but the people sang and listened with a tense, expectant air. Even the children felt that something of far-reaching importance had happened.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEACON PROPOSES A MUZZLE

During the delivery of the young minister's trial sermon, the pious people of Maple Crossing gave him their entire attention, too much interested to watch the face of Deacon Grey for a sign of favor or disapproval. If they had watched his face they would have been none the wiser, for it never wore a more passive, flint-and-iron expression; and the young minister was compelled himself to wait until the deacon spoke of the sermon before knowing what the result was to be.

"You have preached with a view of becoming our pastor," Deacon Grey said, bringing up the subject, "and you preached a very unusual sermon."

"Unusual conditions require unusual treatment," said the young man.

"But the pulpit should be used for no other purpose than to advance the simple mission of the church," said the deacon.

"And what, in your opinion, is the mission of the church?" inquired William Bruce, as quietly as possible.

"The mission of the church," replied the deacon solemnly, "is to save souls, which it must do by elevating the morals in our own country and converting heathen nations."

"Which last we proceed to do as follows," the young man said, smiling, "we exert ourselves to the utmost, financially, to send a missionary to carry the Gospel to the heathen. The same ship that takes him carries also enough damnation in the way of

American rum to destroy more souls in a year than the missionary can save in ten. The heart of the church is good, but she has a poor head for figuring out cause and effect."

The deacon shifted his attack. "You would prohibit temptation," he said. "Do you consider it the making of a man to shut temptation away from him?"

"Not necessarily the making of a man, but the salvation, many times, of the boy," was the stout reply.

"Perhaps—but what sort of a man will a boy make who never learns to resist temptation? It is the mission of the church to teach men to resist temptation."

"And while the church is teaching one man to resist temptation the state is allowing its active partner, the legalized liquor traffic, to send a hundred men to hell. At this rate will the church purify society or evangelize the world?"

"The attitude of the church is hostile to the liquor traffic. Her prayers ascend continually to God in behalf of the widows and orphans made so by this terrible crime. Her resolutions ring clear and unmistakable." The deacon was growing almost eloquent.

"The voice of the church is all right," replied the preacher. "It is her actions that are lamentable; her continued neglect to help answer her own prayers in behalf of these widows and orphans is swiftly growing criminal."

"We are a conservative people in Maple Crossing," the deacon remarked, after a pause, "and you referred yesterday to the unfortunate son of an unfortunate neighbor of mine as being at the mercy of the state, intimating that as we men of Maple Crossing are represented in the general make-up of the state we are in some way responsible for the lamentable condition of affairs in my neighbor's

family. It strikes me that your way of saying things leaves a wrong impression, and I consider your expression, 'at the mercy of the state,' little short of heathenish."

"And yet it but dimly hints of the heathenism of a state in partnership with the liquor traffic."

"But you misconstrue the attitude of the state. The state does not approve of the saloon. On the other hand the state, by her courts and judgments, has declared the saloon to be a nuisance."

Again the minister smiled.

"Yet the incontrovertible fact," he said, "is that, in spite of all that, the state takes a price from the saloon, by virtue of which she allows the establishment and conduct of the nuisance. She turns the money received into the public coffers and uses it for its public purposes, while good men talk of the amount saved in taxes. As well might a harlot living on the proceeds of harlotry pretend to be opposed to vice. The facts declare otherwise.

"As to a nuisance," he continued, "what would be the result if some injured mother should try to abate one of these institutions that the state, as you say, declares to be a nuisance and yet licenses?"

Deacon Grey remained thoughtful a moment, then he said: "I am not granting all that you say, but even were it true, the church can do no more than she is doing with the means in hand."

"I can never understand the meaning of that statement," said the preacher, warmly. "The church has the fighting strength at her command to strike the blow next election day, if she chooses, that will forever decide the fate of the legalized liquor traffic."

Deacon Grey assumed a satisfied air.

"The church," he said, "wisely casts her vote with that political party promising the most good to the most people."

The young clergyman looked into the cold, flinty

eyes very earnestly as he said with emphasis: "And by voting with that party perpetuates the traffic that throws your neighbor's wife and son and orphan child unprotected on the world. Between the two great political parties there can be no choice when it comes to the irrepressible issue of the liquor business, for a high license policy is no more effective in crushing the traffic than the anti-sumptuary policy would be. Material prosperity would be a good rallying cry for a degenerate political party, but the welfare of the republic demands a recognition of moral issues, and the man who votes for the perpetuation of the liquor traffic, upon any pretext whatever, has signally failed in the discharge of his duty as a Christian and as a patriot."

"And you would advise what——" and the deacon paused and waited.

"I would advise the voting church to vote as it prays, to vote for the party, the only political party, that is everlastingly and unalterably opposed to the liquor traffic. I would advise that patriots and Christians vote to make it a blessing rather than a curse to be 'at the mercy of the state.'"

"You would make of the pulpit a political stump," sneered the deacon.

"I would see to it that judgment began in the house of the Lord," returned the younger man.

"You are very outspoken," Deacon Grey observed, after a moment that was evidently employed to control his feelings. "We need stirring up in Maple Crossing—but not along this line. We do not believe in mixing politics and religion. We believe the mission of the church is to make men strong to resist temptation, not to hedge the temptation away from the man."

"Your neighbor's son Horace," the preacher replied, "has been with you some time, yet I learn that the church has not rendered him proof against temptation."

"He was all right until he went to Trentwood," the deacon hurried to say. "In fact he was an unusually good boy, with a high purpose and a remarkable will power."

"And he was all right in Trentwood, you have told me, until a certain Jacob Crane, acting by consent of the state, entrapped him?"

"He should not have been entrapped."

"Certainly not; but that he was goes to prove that the church might have done him better service had it kept the saloon from setting up in Trentwood to tempt him, than it did by warning him for ten years not to fall into temptation."

"He should not have been tempted. I have raised three sons and not one of them drinks a drop."

"Were they raised across the road from a saloon?"

"They never saw a saloon while they were boys. We have never had one in Maple Crossing and never will. If the attempt were made I would stop it with my own hands."

"And in laying hands on licensed saloon property you would immediately discover the force of the silent partner—the state."

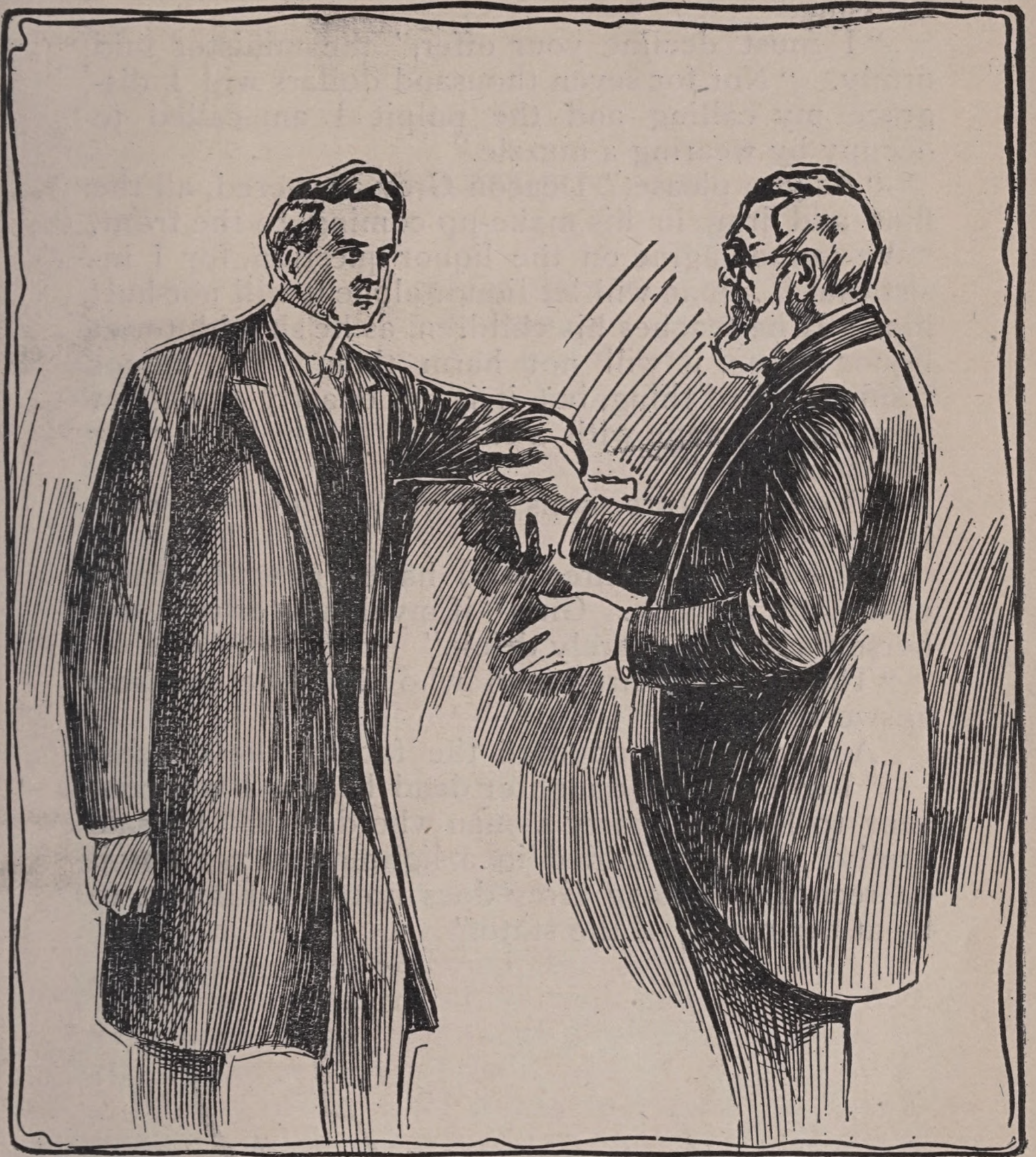
"You're off the track on this question—away off," the deacon said after another pause, "but you're honest and a good speaker. I am therefore going to make you a proposition. We will give you six hundred dollars a year with the parsonage thrown in, provided you do not preach politics."

"You mean that I must not recommend to my people the measure that I believe necessary to the overthrow of the liquor traffic?"

"Not if it be a political measure."

"Then I must decline your offer. There is no other measure to recommend."

"We will raise your salary to seven hundred next



"WE WILL GIVE YOU \$600 A YEAR WITH THE PAR-
SONAGE THROWN IN, PROVIDED YOU DO
NOT PREACH POLITICS."

year, which is good pay for a place the size of Maple Crossing."

"I must decline your offer," the minister said firmly. "Not for seven thousand dollars will I disgrace my calling and the pulpit I am called to occupy by wearing a muzzle."

"As you please," Deacon Grey answered, all the flint and iron in his make-up coming to the front. "We cannot agree on the liquor question, for I insist that if a man will let liquor alone it will not hurt him. If he teaches his children, as he should, to let liquor alone, it will not harm them. The liquor traffic is a bad thing, but it is not exactly a beast of prey, or a savage with a club waiting in hiding for innocent boys."

"You have three sons and a daughter," the minister said reflectively.

"I have. My three sons have grown to man's estate and are safe. Girls—if my daughter were not herself superior—rarely drink."

"They often marry men who do," the minister answered.

A quick flush mounted the face of the deacon.

"I will see my daughter dead before I will consent to let her marry a man who drinks," he said firmly. Then he added in a lighter tone: "Put it on record: Deacon Grey does not feel himself to be at the mercy of the state."

CHAPTER X.

AN APPEAL TO THE STATE'S PARTNER

Early on the morning preceding the midnight when the screams of a temporary maniac aroused the Rev. William Bruce to preach his extraordinary sermon, Mrs. Russel had begun her accustomed watch for her boy, and when the usual time for his appearance had passed and he had not arrived, the overwhelming fear that was always brooding near her heart crept into it.

All day she watched and when evening came she took her place by the gate and fixed her eyes in an unbroken gaze down the shaded street, but no sight or sound of him rewarded her watch until in the stillness of the night he dashed past her making the night hideous with his screams.

The greater portion of the night after he had disappeared down the shadowy road, she stood at the gate trying to shape some plan of action whereby she might snatch him back from destruction. Her one sole hope seemed to lie in an appeal to Jacob Crane, and although the day following was Sunday she determined to visit him at once and plead with him, as a woman pleads for life, not to sell Horace any more liquor.

By way of the road it was four miles to Trentwood; by rail it was not so far, and she determined to walk along the tracks, both to save time and to lessen the chances of meeting anyone. Leaving Dot in bed with the kitten, she started on her long walk, and at length, wearied almost to the point of exhaustion, caught the welcome glare of red switch

lights, and knew that she had reached Trentwood.

Leaving the track opposite the platform of the station, she approached the telegraph window and peered in with the faint hope of seeing Horace, but he was not there. In his place was a stranger, and with a heavy heart she crossed the street in the direction of Crane's Place.

The building seemed to be dark. The front doors were closed and deserted, but before she had reached the place someone stepped out of a back door, and the stream of light that fell for a moment across the pavement told her that the place was not entirely deserted as it appeared.

Several times she approached the place, and even after she had lifted her foot to the step, she paused; but the vision of a stranger in the place where Horace should be sitting decided her movements. Expecting to find the proprietor of the place alone on a Sunday evening, she stepped in. She was much surprised on passing beyond the screens to find the room occupied by a number of men and boys, and the sight of two slender boys at the bar in the act of drinking gave her a sudden start, for one of them looked like Horace.

But a second glance reassured her, and so great was her relief that she did not stop to think of the flagrant violation of the law that was taking place before her eyes. She did not even note that the boys quickly put their glasses on the bar and that these with the bottles beside them were hurriedly whisked away. She thought only of Horace.

"Do you know Horace Russel?" she inquired, stepping to the bar.

"Horace Russel?" Jacob Crane inquired, somewhat crossly. "Night operator across at the station?"

"Yes."

"Slightly acquainted with him, madam."

"He is my son."

"A very nice looking boy and as keen as a knife blade."

"He is my boy," Mrs. Russel repeated, "and last night he was—was—I may as well say it, he was drunk."

"Yes, madam."

"He was drunk, I say," she repeated wildly, the uncertain light dancing in her eyes.

"I'm sorry to hear it, madam. Bad habit for boys to get into."

"Did he get his liquor here?"

"Very likely."

"Did you sell it to him?"

"I do not remember."

"Do you know he cannot hold his position if he gets drunk?"

"I should not suppose he could."

"And do you know that we were destitute and half starved when he got this position?"

"I had not heard of it," and Jacob Crane half turned to hide a smile.

"And we will be again if he loses it," she continued wildly.

"That will be very sad," he said, with a show of pity.

"And I have come to beg a favor of you. You are a man. You do not know what it is to hear your children cry for bread. Perhaps you do not know what it is to see them shiver in winter. You do not know what it is to suffer—to suffer for common necessities—but, my God! I know what suffering is, and mine has all come to me through drink!" and she pointed to the bar beside which the boys still stood.

"And now I've come to beg with you, to plead with you, to pray you, for the love of God to have pity on me and promise me that you will not sell my son any more liquor. He is so good, so bright, so brave; and he has such a splendid will; he is



"PROMISE ME!" AND STEPPING TOWARD HIM SHE REACHED HER TREMBLING HAND FORWARD AND WAITED FOR HIM TO SPEAK.

making our poor lives so happy, and the future holds so much of pleasure for us all. He never drank until you came here, and he never would. He does not want to drink, Promise me—for heaven's sake promise me that you will not sell him any more of the poison that makes a maniac of him! If you do you will kill me as surely as if you struck a knife in my heart—you will damn him as surely as if you with your own strong arm pushed him off of some high wall into hell. Promise me!" And stepping toward him she reached her trembling hand forward and waited for him to speak.

"There have been exactly ten women in this place this week asking for such a promise," Jacob Crane said impatiently. "If I promise every mother who asks me, where will my living come in? I must live."

"Must your living come by my death and by my boy's destruction? Must you, like a leech, suck the very life blood out of our existence?"

"Don't get excited and talk saucy!" Jacob Crane commanded.

"But I will!" she exclaimed fiercely. "You have no right to sell the poison to my boy that is certain to curse his life and send his soul to torment—you have no right, I say!"

Jacob Crane caught her roughly by the arm and led her to the rear of the bar.

"Woman," he said, with a touch of savage triumph in his tone as he pointed to a framed paper hanging against the wall, "read that and see whether or not I have a right to sell liquor to your boy!"

Mrs. Russel turned her eyes to the paper but the letters seemed to snarl and twist in a manner that made reading impossible.

"What is it?" she inquired in bewilderment.

"It is a liquor license and I obtained it from the state, and though all the women in the state come here swearing on their knees that I have no right to sell whisky, the state protects my interests. If you

want to get up a fight, fight with the state. If the state don't want me here let it say so by refusing to take from me a part of my profits. That it does accept a portion of the cash I take in is proof of its good will, no matter what may be said to the contrary. Tell your troubles to the preacher—the politician—the state!”

“The state! the state!” she exclaimed. “I do not understand. Why should the state enter into the business of ruining boys, starving children, spoiling homes, breaking mothers' hearts and sending men to hell?”

“You are a little excited. Women often get that way, especially when they have boys. I do not sandbag your son and drag him here. He comes.”

“He would not if your place were not here to come to.”

Jacob Crane laughed good-naturedly.

“Certainly not,” he said.

“Promise me,” she said quickly, “for I must go and find Horace.”

Jacob Crane regarded her a moment thoughtfully. Something in the expression of her eyes and in her hurried gestures gave him an uneasy feeling.

“Very well,” he said, “I'll promise you.”

“Before Almighty God you promise you'll never sell nor give Horace Russel another drop of liquor?”

“Before God and all the holy angels, I promise,” he said gravely.

Mrs. Russel breathed a sigh of intense relief.

“God bless you,” she said, and hurriedly left the saloon.

CHAPTER XI.

SHADOW AND AGAIN SUNSHINE

When Mrs. Russel returned to her home after securing Jacob Crane's solemn promise not to sell Horace any more liquor she felt a sense of security that she had not known since the saloon had been first opened, for it never once occurred to her mind that a man who would flagrantly violate every provision of the contract entered into with his partner, the state, would violate any other contract he chose to make, without a pang of conscience.

Entering the silent house after a hurried walk home she went to the bed where she had left Dot, and to her great joy found Horace lying by her side holding one of her thin hands in his and sound asleep.

His breathing was regular and natural. His face was pale but his mother could detect no trace of liquor, though she bent low inhaling his breath.

A lock of hair had dropped across his forehead, and once Mrs. Russel raised her hand to brush it off but stopped lest she should awaken him. There was an expression of boyish innocence on his face, and while she stood looking down on him it seemed to the mother that the screams of the night before must have come from the throat of some demon born in her own deranged mind, never from the sleeping boy.

Though she was weary Mrs. Russel did not go to bed. Horace had her place and she did not want to disturb him; so all through the night she rocked softly or paced the floor, at intervals stepping to the

bed and bending low over the boy. Feeling secure in her belief that Jacob Crane would keep his promise, her only fear now was that Horace had already lost his position, and impatiently she waited until morning to learn.

"Who worked for you last night?" she inquired when, after a late morning sleep, he finally rose from the bed.

"The student, I suppose," he answered.

"You had better try to sleep again this afternoon or you'll not be able to keep awake tonight."

"I do not have to go tonight."

"Are you discharged?" she inquired quickly, the unnatural light dancing in her eyes.

"Not discharged, mother, but laid off for a while—just a little while, I hope."

"What for?" and the question was slowly put.

"The student let a train pass."

"Where were you?"

"I was not there."

"I know—O God! I know where you were, Horace, and everybody in Maple Crossing knows."

"Is it as bad as that?" he exclaimed bitterly. "How I wish—Oh how I wish from the bottom of my heart that I were dead!" and he pressed his hands to his head.

"Don't!" his mother cried sharply. "My life hangs on you, Horace. All the hope of our future is in your keeping. You are brave and strong and young. You have fallen, but your fall may prove your great salvation, yet."

"I wish that Crane had died before he set his foot in Trentwood. All was well until he came," moaned the boy.

"He will not sell you anymore of his poison," she said assuringly. "I went to see him last night, myself, and he promised me before God that he would never sell nor give you another drop. Take heart, little boy. We have passed the worst now, for you

have learned what it will do to you—even to you, Horace.”

For a moment the changing expression on the boy's pale face was uncertain, but as his mother watched she saw the old firm look of determination shaping itself, and when Horace looked up at her a moment later the expression of his eye was reassuring.

“How hard it is to learn as I have learned,” he said slowly, “but I have learned. Crane will never get a chance to refuse me the drop he promised he would. I will never set my foot in his cursed place again. Until I am reinstated in my position I will stay right here with you, mother. I will help you and study as I have never studied,” and Horace threw his arm around his mother and rested his head against her shoulder.

She dropped her head until it touched his and then burst into a flood of tears.

“Don't cry, mother,” Horace repeated softly over and over. “The worst is surely past now. I'll shun Crane's place as I would the pest house. I will be what I may be if I keep away from that saloon.”

The days that passed while Horace stayed at home were peaceable days for Mrs. Russel, for her boy was always in her sight. Not once did he leave Maple Crossing.

But he was not recalled to his position,

A month slipped by and with it the wages that Horace had saved.

Then another month, and at its end, Mrs. Russel found herself in debt at Deacon Grey's store.

When a third month began with no prospect of Horace regaining his place, Mrs. Russel went out soliciting plain sewing.

The necessity for this made Horace more miserable than he had been since his father's death, but it was useless to object. Bread they must have, and the most he could do was to assist his mother, which

he gladly did, even to running the sewing machine and washing dishes.

Slowly the winter months passed and spring came again.

The old apple tree blossomed and the days drew near when Nellie was to return from school.

The thought that she would come and find him without work, or worse, perhaps, find him after all his talk and work, bending over a dishpan or a sewing machine, was to Horace most exasperating, and voicing his fierce determination never again to touch liquor, he wrote a letter to the chief dispatcher asking to be taken on trial once more.

After several days of eager waiting the reply on which hung so much of joy or disappointment came and was opened by fingers that trembled with apprehension.

The communication was brief and to the point, advising the young operator of the importance of the position he had once held and had applied for again, and of the great loss to property as well as of life that might ensue as the result of a trivial mistake. Somewhat to his surprise Horace also learned that since his release from duty in Trentwood his conduct had been carefully observed, and that, since he had given no occasion for reprimand, he would be reinstated, with the understanding that another offense would forever cut his name from the pay roll of the company. His orders were to report for duty at Trentwood the next night.

When Horace read the contents of his letter he was almost too overjoyed to speak, and the task of manifesting the joy of the family fell to the lot of little Dot, who danced and laughed until she was dizzy and out of breath.

The days of "steak and doughnuts" were to return.

When Horace started out the next night with his lunch basket his mother and Dot stood by the gate.

and watched his youthful figure disappear between the newly-leaved maple branches.

The next morning, and for many succeeding mornings, Horace came home promptly, and though Mrs. Russel watched his pale face closely, looked deep into his clear dark eyes and bent over him while he slept to detect some trace of liquor on his breath, not by the slightest sign was she led to suppose that he had been again to Crane's place. As the weeks passed the hope that though often crushed dies hard revived strongly. The quick, strange light seldom danced into her eyes, and her lips, unused to singing, once more parted to shape long unsung melodies.

To Horace life never seemed so full of pleasure nor the future so near. Looking back over the winter, in spite of his disgraceful fall and the temporary loss of his position, he felt that he had indeed done well, for he had made long strides in his studies and had almost caught up with Nellie.

He felt strong and secure, his heart was light as the days passed, each one bringing him nearer to the time when he could again see Nellie. He counted these days eagerly and was intensely happy with that happiness that comes to bless a man's life but once.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST MEADOW VISIT

Nellie was coming, and on the morning of the day on which she was to arrive, Horace, coming home to sleep after his night's work, said: "Call me early, mother. Call me two hours before it is time for me to go. I am going to take a two hours' trip to heaven. I am going to walk in the meadow with Nellie."

Mrs. Russel did not find it necessary to waken him. Before the appointed time he stood by the garden fence where they had so often climbed into the meadow and looked across the field that had once seemed so boundless.

His first glimpse of it left the disappointing impression that it was pitifully small, but while he looked the field seemed to enlarge once more. The dark, still line on the farther side grew into a rushing river, and the dandelions multiplied and glistened, until it seemed that heaven had dropped its stars. The babel of many insects changed to the chanting of deep mystery. Then came the vision of a tiny child in a gingham apron and pink sunbonnet. Sometimes she sat in the grass, sometimes she made tracks in the mud, oftentimes she fell, but she was never far from him, and the boy smiled as he dreamed, until his dream was broken by the rustle of a woman's garment, and on turning he met the vision of his dream—a sunny-faced young lady in a dainty dress and a large sun hat.

"Let us hurry over the fence into the magic spot," she said.

"Have you noticed how near together the boundary fences run now?" he inquired. "Once they seemed a day's journey apart."

"You must see with a child's eyes to-day," Nellie said. "You must listen with a child's ears, think with a child's thoughts and love with a child's soul."

"How can I," he inquired, "when you walk beside me in a trailing gown so thoroughly self-reliant? I used to help a little girl who often stubbed her toe."

"Would it help bear out the illusion if you could lead her down the cow path once again?"

"It would do better—it would prove a reality."

"Then here's my hand. Now I am little once again. Take care of me."

Horace caught her hand quickly.

"How well it fits," he said, pressing his fingers closely around it, "and what a charm it possesses, for I am slipping back to the old, sweet days. Listen, Nellie, we are coming to the river. Do you hear it roaring? We must be careful as we stand near it. It is large and angry and would like to carry us away."

They paused a moment and listened to the purling of the stream.

"What a river!" he presently said. "I can step across it with ease."

"And how much hotter the sun is than it used to be," Nellie observed.

"Let us go under the tree and watch the swans," and she sat down on the bank and, removing her hat, lifted her face to the white flecked blue sky.

For a few moments they watched the lazy motion of the white masses, then Horace turned to his companion.

"Can you make them out?" he inquired.

"I'm sorry," she answered softly, "but the swans have gone. There are clouds now—only clouds and nothing more."

Horace laughed, but his laugh ended in a sigh.

"Then there is nothing left but the mystery in the thicket. Let us see if they still chant secrets that we cannot understand," and Nellie inclined her head in the direction of the tangled growth where myriad insects kept the air vibrating with a ceaseless humming.

"What do they say?" he asked after listening intently a few moments.

"I am trying my best to hear voices of mystery, but I hear only crickets and cicadas, with now and then a bull frog."

Again the boy sighed.

"It's no use, Nellie—no earthly use!"

"Not a bit," she said, half sadly "But, Horace, you are here and I am here."

"And life lies all before us," he added quickly. "Do you know the reason we hear no voice of mystery now? It was only ignorance that lent the mystery in those other days."

"And is it because we are ignorant of what the future holds that we are happy—so very happy here now?"

"It cannot be entirely," Horace answered thoughtfully, "for we are not so ignorant as then. There may be incidentals that we cannot foretell, but the great long future itself is decreed. Nothing but death can wholly alter it."

Nellie shuddered.

"Death is too far away to be considered, Horace," she said quickly, "and too cold and still—too dead and endless. Let us not talk of death. We have but begun to live. We have only learned a few of life's lessons yet."

"I have learned my hardest."

"What has it been?"

"The hardest lesson I ever learned, or the saddest knowledge that ever came to me, came the day I learned that there is some fatal weakness in my constitutional make-up that seems to undermine my

will at times. Something that makes me know that I must act the coward part and flee from a foe I hate, instead of meeting it on its own ground and fighting it to the last finish."

"You a coward, Horace? You are not afraid to meet any foe!"

"I tried to meet the saloon as other men meet it every passing day, and you know with what results. Since learning by the bitterest experience that a boy ever had, I have not so much as gone on Crane's side of the street. I go behind it, to the side of it—anywhere instead of in front of its open door, and these nights when the air hangs heavy I have closed my door to shut out the fumes of liquor that float across the street and almost bewilder me at times."

"But Crane will not sell you any more liquor—your mother has told me so."

"The only reason Crane will not is because he will never get a chance. He has promised half a dozen women in Trentwood not to sell to their boys and he sells to them continually."

"Horace!" exclaimed Nellie, clenching her fist. "If Jacob Crane ever breaks his promise and sells you liquor, I will get a hatchet and go straight to his saloon and smash every smashable thing in his place—him, too, if he gets in my way! It is a shame for a man to sell such poison as he sells. It is a shame that a boy like you must dodge the saloon and keep beyond its reach as if it were some deadly scourge or bloodthirsty beast of prey. It is a shame, I say, and I wish the women of this state would rise up and smash his cursed saloon into kindling wood!"

Horace looked into Nellie's flashing eyes.

"Nellie — little Nellie," he said, sadly, "don't you know that if the saloon were not protected by the state, the mothers of this country would have ended it long ago? The saloon is not like any other nuisance. Behind it stands the power of the state, always on the defensive as it must be, for the

saloon pays many thousand dollars into the pocket of the state annually "

" They are in partnership, then? "

" Yes, it is a partnership affair, and a woman in hitting the saloon would measure arms with the sovereign state, which she can never do unless she some day gets the ballot."

" And so it's the state, the sovereign state, that is training boys to be cowards, that is teaching boys if they do not want to be tempted into a saloon they must sneak around a back street or an alley."

" I will not always have to flee before the face of the saloon, Nellie. I am growing stronger. I would be strong enough now only that I have come by my craving for strong liquor in the same way that I came by my will power. But the one must perish from disuse while the other forever grows stronger by vigorous exercise. I will be master of my fate."

" How I love to hear you say it. It means so much to me. Sometime when our dreams come true, when we get a laboratory all our own, I will help you to discover something that will arouse the scientific world, or I will help you write a treatise that will command the attention of the whole medical profession. I have always wanted to be a physician, but my father says no. To be the wife of such a one as you are to be will be still better."

Horace looked into the girl's eager face with all the intense love of his soul.

" Nellie, Nellie! " he exclaimed passionately, pressing her hand to his lips.

" Because I love you," she said as if in answer to some unspoken question.

" But do you suppose your father will consent to your being the wife of a physician—the one we talk so much of—any sooner than he would consent to your being one yourself."

" Not now, but when he sees what you will some

day be, he will be happy, he will be proud to have things as we plan."

"And if he should not?"

"So far my life has been shaped according to his wishes. Even to-morrow I go to Adkins to take a four weeks' special course in primary work so that I can take charge of the Maple Crossing school, not because I want to, but because he wants me to. Children should be obedient, and I have been and will be, until the time comes when I cannot be obedient and do justice to myself. When that day comes I shall use a woman's judgment and act accordingly."

"Nellie," said Horace slowly, "I do not want you to go to Adkins. I never think of the place without a shudder. It is there that the state, in all its regal might, is seen in partnership with the saloon, for they are on every corner. It seems to me that death in such a place must lurk on every hand."

"But I will not go near a saloon. The saloon power will not harm me if I let it alone."

"It hurt me before I was born and has not ceased to torment me ever since," he urged.

"But there is a difference. Do not fear. The saloon can never strike at me unless through you, Horace."

Tears sprang to the boy's eyes.

"Then it will never strike you, never, darling Nellie."

For a few moments they sat in silence, Horace studying Nellie's face lovingly.

"I have always known that you are beautiful, Nellie," he said presently, "but I never saw you look quite as you do this afternoon."

"It's in your eyes," she laughed, merrily.

"I should like to see you in your graduating gown. I have dreamed of how you must look. Will you put it on some day and call me to the fence?"

"When I come home from Adkins."

* * *



"I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU IN YOUR
GRADUATING GOWN."

When Horace started to his work that night
Nellie stood on the front porch.

' Good-bye, Horace,' she called, "be good while
I'm away."

And looking back as he paused before turning
the corner, he saw that she still stood on the porch
and the motion of the hand she lifted and waved
told him that she yet watched.

CHAPTER XIII.

NELLIE COMES HOME

The city of Adkins is one of those typical American cities where the spirit of progress shows itself in its method of granting, for a cash consideration, a legitimate existence to certain soul and body destroying agencies.

Being central in location and approached by water as well as by many railroads, it is a famous city for political conventions, church conferences, industrial meetings and educational gatherings; and the public-spirited citizens of Adkins always keep a good supply of patriotic bunting on hand to be used for decorative purposes when either the brewers or the bishops hold a meeting to devise plans for furthering their respective interests.

It was for one of the schools in this city that Nellie Grey, with a number of her companions, left Maple Crossing one cloudless summer morning.

Deacon Grey's usually stern face was relaxed and smiling as he assisted the young people in preparing for their drive, and it was with a look of admiration akin to worship that he turned his eyes many times on the smiling face of his only daughter, for in Nellie Grey, whose future seemed so bright, the long dream of his life was about to be realized. Nellie was to be a teacher in the Maple Crossing school and her days after her return from Adkins were to be spent in a home that had long been dreary without a woman's presence.

When all was ready, Nellie turned to her father. "Kiss me goodbye," she said lifting her face.

"When will you outgrow your baby notions?" he said holding her at arm's length a moment.

"Never, I'm afraid," she said, laughing.

Then he put his arms around her and kissed her twice.

After the carriage had started down the quiet road, Nellie looked back and called as she had to Horace, "Be good while I'm away!" and long after the merry party had gone beyond sight and hearing, Deacon Grey stood on the step, his face wearing the tender expression that his daughter's presence always brought to light.

After her brief visit home, the house seemed unusually lonely and the deacon stayed at the store later than was his custom, and counted the days until Nellie should return to go away no more. The third evening, as the long summer twilight was shading into gloom, a messenger came to the door and handed him a telegram. With some curiosity as to what urgent matter had necessitated the sending of such a message at that hour, he hastily opened the envelope and drew out the folded yellow paper, which he spread on top of a glass show case, and after adjusting his spectacles carefully, proceeded to read. Over and over he read it, then he turned to the address to make sure there was no mistake, returning his gaze to the pale purple printing that bore the following news:

"Your daughter shot and instantly killed by intoxicated man at 7:45. Advise as to disposition of body."

When he had read the few neatly printed words a dozen times, Deacon Grey folded the paper calmly and went home to harness a horse to drive to Adkins. "How under heaven has such a frightful mistake ever been made?" he questioned over and over of himself, as he hastily prepared for the journey which he confidently expected would set his mind at rest.

But the horrible mistake lay not in the telegram, but somewhere farther back, and when Deacon Grey learned that the impartial hand of death, directed in its aim by a rum-made maniac, had smitten his daughter, all the flint and iron in his nature seemed suddenly turned to multen fury, and in his fierce indignation he longed for a voice to speak the emotion that swayed him to the depths of his soul. His thoughts turned to William Bruce, whom he immediately summoned by telegraph.

The young minister had not yet heard the news of the tragedy and was somewhat surprised at receiving the peremptory summons, but, supposing that it related to the pastorate in Maple Crossing, he immediately prepared to answer it in person.

He was not met at the train and, having no conversation with anyone on the way to the house, he was not prepared for the sight of the black rosette with its fluttering ribbons that hung by the door.

While he paused, his name was spoken, and looking up he met Deacon Grey, his face flushed, his eyes bright and something like a hard, unnatural smile hovering over his face.

"Come in," he said, grasping the minister by the hand. "Come in. I have sent for you to call down the curses of Almighty God on the man who has robbed me of my daughter. You are the man to do it—you have the gift of words—you fear no man. Speak for an old man that has been robbed. Curse him! Curse him!" and Deacon Grey clinched his fist with feverish force.

So overcome with surprise was the minister that he paused at the threshold, for a moment speechless, then he faltered, "I do not understand."

"Come in!" again commanded Deacon Grey, and conducting William Bruce into the hall he thrust a paper into his hand in which the following lines met his eye:

"NELLIE GREY SHOT. Nellie Grey, the

daughter of a wealthy and influential citizen of Maple Crossing, was shot and instantly killed last night. Sitting with a little group of friends upon the lawn of the home where she was boarding, the charming young woman was singing 'Home, Sweet Home,' when a shot rang out sharply. The song ceased suddenly with the pathetic words, 'Home, Sweet Home,' and the singer dropped lifeless to the ground, her right temple pierced by a bullet hole.

"The murderer is the son of a well-to-do farmer living near this city. He has been in town several days and has spent his time visiting dives and vicious resorts. He is nearly frantic with the results of his shooting and declares that he only intended to frighten the young ladies.

"The victim's body has been removed to Maple Crossing for burial. The murderer is safely lodged in jail."

"God forbid!" exclaimed the young minister with a trembling voice.

"But God did not forbid, though I've been serving him for over forty years!" the old man exclaimed passionately. "It is true, and I have sent for you that you may stand beside her open grave and with your whole soul and mind and strength curse the man that has robbed me of my child—my daughter. Come!" he again commanded, and seizing the minister's arm he drew him through the hall and front parlor and paused in the doorway of the second room.

"There!" he exclaimed excitedly, pointing his long arm across the room, his finger trembling as if palsied. "They are digging her grave while we stand here—every minute a shovelful—two shovelfulls—three shovelfulls of cold earth are tossed out of her narrow grave! Oh, my God! my God!—and you are to stand by that grave and call down heaven's direst curses on the man that has robbed me of my daughter."

She was reclining on her side, her sunny hair resting on a satin pillow. She wore a soft white dress—her graduating gown, and from beneath the ruffle one white slipper peeped out. Her left hand lay by her side, and in the other, which had dropped across her breast, she held a June rose.

Her position was so natural, her face so restful, that the young minister took an involuntary step backward and breathed softly lest he should awaken her.

But a second swift glance showed him that the couch was a casket with the side dropped down. Still the delusion lasted, until the stillness was broken again by the harsh voice of the bereaved father.

"She will never wake again. She was put to sleep by a bullet," and, stepping rapidly to the casket he raised the head of the fair corpse.

"Look under!" he commanded, and William Bruce mechanically dropped on his knees and looked.

Against the pallid white of her temple a blue-black wound showed distinctly, and on the pillow which her head had pressed a faint pink stain was outlined.

"Have you seen?" the old man inquired huskily, still holding the head above the pillow.

"I have seen," the minister answered, with a groan he could not suppress.

"Then tell it! I am old and undone. I am defrauded of the happiness that I have planned for years. My child lies before my eyes, murdered. Curse her murderer!"

"That I will!" answered the minister, fervently.

"I am alone—all alone in my trouble!" the deacon said suddenly, after a pause.

"No—not alone," Bruce said kindly. "Fifty thousand other fathers have been stricken as you are stricken this day. Fifty thousand mother

hearts have bled as yours bleeds to-day. You are not alone. You are but one of an innumerable and ever increasing throng that must be outraged, robbed, and worse than killed."

"Yes—yes," interrupted the old man. "Worse than killed—you understand. Curse him! Curse him!"

"I think," the minister said thoughtfully, "your idea is that I shall say such words beside your daughter's grave as will turn the attention of those present to the real cause of this tragedy. I think you wish me to call down the curse of Almighty God on the Curse that has caused the sorrow of the unnumbered thousands who suffer with you. If so, I must not curse a man but a traffic."

"Curse it."

"But the liquor traffic has been made by law as legal as your own respectable business. Behind it stands the state."

"Then curse the state! Curse the state! Sift the matter to the bottom and let the curse fall where it may."

And William Bruce remembered the awful contrast between this meeting and his last conversation with Deacon Grey.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THEY HAVE TAKEN HER AWAY"

The funeral of Nellie Grey was one never to be forgotten by those in attendance or by the minister officiating.

A congregation composed of almost every person in Maple Crossing and numbers from the surrounding country crowded into the quiet burying spot, back of the Maple Crossing church, and stood knee deep in the long grass.

When the casket had been put in place, and the four strong men who were the chief mourners had taken their position near the edge of the grave, the minister opened his Book.

"Some months ago," he said in his clear tones, "I spoke to you in your church, using for a text a verse of prophetic Scripture particularly adapted to conditions existing in our country to-day. My words at that time sounded strange to you. You did not see the grave necessity that forced the message. You had not heard the mutterings of the destruction that has so long impended. You had not heard the wail of motherhood. You had not caught the vision of tortured faces. You had not seen in the vision ten thousand hands lifted beseechingly to you, nor heard ten thousand voices pleading to you for help, and as I spoke you thought you listened to the prophecy of a blow that would never fall.

"To-day I stand before you, summoned by one on whom the blow has fallen; summonsed by a father—a defrauded and robbed father. I stand here to-day to speak the last words at the ceremony that

takes a loving and loved daughter from the arms of a father and three brothers and gives her into the silent keeping of the grave; and in doing this I wish to call your attention to a passage of Scripture which you have heard but which has never sounded in your ears as it will sound now."

Then he read: "'A wonderful and a horrible thing is committed in the land . . . and what will ye do in the end thereof?'"

"I have been asked," went on the preacher, "by the father of our lifeless friend to call down the curse of God on the Cause, wherever found, that has robbed him of his child.

"To do this may not be pleasant, but until the 'wonderful and horrible thing' that stains our land has been removed, before God I can do nothing less than cry aloud and spare not.

"The hand that held the weapon by which this life was suddenly extinguished, was palsied and shaking like a leaf. When the poor, trembling, rum-made maniac aimed into the moonlight on that fatal night to shock the life from a stout young heart, he did not mean to kill. Behind him stands the legalized saloon, which is the cause of murder unceasingly. For the sake of bloody gold, the saloon continually wrecks and is allowed to wreck human lives.

"No need to curse such a traffic. God's curse already rests with the heaviness of Omnipotence upon the traffic, but cursed though it may be, ten thousand times ten thousand curses cannot take its life, for the fact remains that the state has made it a legal institution.

"Let me find the power behind the crime-producing agency of the day and on this let me call my curse.

"The power behind the crime-producing agency is the state—the sovereign state. You know it—yes, you know it well. For a stipulated sum the

state grants to the liquor traffic the right to make maniacs of men otherwise peaceably inclined. The state for revenue gives to a class the right to engage in making robbers of purity, robbers of manhood, robbers of motherlove, robbers of happiness, robbers of hope, robbers of life—murderers! Men, women and children are tempted, fall and are doomed to destruction at the mercy of the state. At the mercy of the state! Truly a wonderful and horrible thing is in our midst! But shall I curse the sovereign state?

“Let us sift the matter to the bottom. Let us find who Almighty God will hold responsible for the wholesale robbery that is being committed in our land. Let us find the power that steals from the homes of whitehaired parents their sons and daughters and gives them without pity to the grave by the thousand every passing month.

“What is the state? The voters are the state. The voice of the voter is the voice of the state. The will of the voter is the law of the state.

“Men and women, before God, beside this open grave which is soon to close over the form of one you have known and known to love, here to-day let us have courage to sift this matter to the bottom. Do we expect the saloonkeeper, the brewer and the politician to vote against the power that furnishes them their means of living? Do these profess to have the cause of God's eternal justice burning in their souls?

“The nation looks to another class for its purifying. The victims of these men hold out their hands to another power for succor. That power is the church of God—the church with its many millions of voting strength and its ceaseless prayers. But, while the church continues to cry vengeance on the robber and promises help to the victims, it continues to cast its fighting strength with the powers that make the state—the state that seems to know no

mercy, the state that pushes its weak ones to the ground, selling their enemy the right to outrage them and to tramp them into the dust.

“How long, men of this great state, will you allow your sons and daughters to live and die at the mercy of the state? The state assumes the protection of the weak. Did it protect from the natural product of the legalized saloon the innocent victim who sleeps here beside her ready grave? Did it protect the gray-haired father who stands here, heart-wounded with wounds that cannot heal? Did it protect these brothers from the outrage of seeing their only sister brutally forced from life and sunshine into the stillness and cold of the tomb? Will the state protect your sons? Will the state protect your daughters, your mothers, your babies, from the ravages of the saloon? Where will the blow fall next? Fall it must, so long as the power protecting the curse is the sovereign state.

“Our friend, our friend’s daughter, has gone from us. We have come to pay our last, sad tribute to her memory. She has passed beyond the border of the state that has not yet learned to be merciful, to the wide borders of the sure mercy of the Eternal Kingdom. It is well with her soul, for by her life she fellowshiped with Christ.

“Her tender heart will never be wrung with such unutterable pain as wrings the hearts of many of the mothers of our proud state to-day. Never will her soul be numb with the anguish of seeing some loved one robbed of manhood and blighted while he travels the slow and tortured way to a drunkard’s grave. Her quiet breast will never be troubled with such sobs as to-day choke the breasts of uncounted hundreds of the noblest women of our race. Her closed eyes will never be flooded with such tears as at this moment run in torrents down the pale cheeks of the outraged motherhood of our state. Her still, white hand will never reach pleadingly into empty dark-

ness in a vain endeavor to hold back from the brink of destruction some one whose life is worth more to her than her own. She is at peace, and the God of eternal justice will see to it that her death be avenged, let the curse fall where it may—on the state that knows no pity when it sells the right to destroy life—on the voter, the Christian voter to whom much has been intrusted and of whom much is expected.”

Then followed the prayer, warm with a sympathy that seemed like that of the Divine Master, but as deep in its probing of souls as the words that had just been uttered.

Then the end had come. The earth was ready to be returned to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust. The coffin was gently lowered, and as it disappeared in the open grave a meadow lark in an adjoining pasture poured out a trill of song, and the long grass bent under a gentle breeze and rustled softly.

While the sexton hesitated before dropping the first loose clods a scream was faintly heard in the distance. The assembled company stirred, but the cry died away.

Scarcely had the first earth clod sent back its hollow sound from the grave when the cry was heard again, this time more distinctly, and a hundred bowed heads were raised.

Nearer and nearer it came now, the cry growing into a plaintive wail as if some maniac were trying to sing and laugh and weep at the same time.

Then the swift clatter of horse hoofs beat on the air, and as the cause of the disturbance drew near the company looked eagerly toward the highway.

The vehicle was now quite near, and the assemblage around the grave caught in broken snatches the words of the old refrain, half sung, half shrieked:

“O, my dear Nellie Grey,
They have taken her away!”

That was all. Over and over it was repeated

with many breaks and in many different tones of voice, and as the vehicle dashed past an open place in the shaded road it was seen to contain two boys.

As the maniacs rushed by the company around the grave shuddered, but the young minister listened intently.

He had not been able to distinguish the features of the boys as they passed, but he was certain that from a distance he heard a woman's voice cry: "Horace! Horace!"

Start next.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN REASON'S LIGHT GOES OUT

After the funeral of his daughter Deacon Grey took the young minister home with him, and the position he had offered him conditionally some months before he now pressed upon him, the one condition required being that he make unremitting war on the legalized liquor traffic.

* * * * *

In thinking, on the day of the funeral, that he heard a woman's voice cry: "Horace! Horace!" William Bruce had not been mistaken. When Horace returned from Trentwood after the news of the murder of Nellie had been received in Maple Crossing his mother gently told him of the tragedy, and he received the news much as Deacon Grey had, refusing to believe it was true until an exclamation from Dot drew him to the window in time to see the undertaker from Trentwood fastening the long black streamers at the door side.

Spellbound, he stood with his eyes fastened on the motion of the man's hands, until the emblem of death had been securely fastened beside the door, then without a word he hastened to his room and locked his door, which was something unusual.

In his room he remained, as was his custom, until five o'clock, but his mother, who listened at the door many times during the day, was certain that she had heard him walking back and forth, and once she heard him in a choking voice call "Nellie!"

During the day Nellie's body was brought home, and when Horace finally appeared, ready to go to Trentwood, his mother suggested that he go over to the stricken home.

"She is dressed in her graduating gown," she said, "and she looks——"

"Mother!" cried Horace, sharply, raising his hand as if to ward off a blow, "dont!"

His mother stopped and left the room to hide from him the tears that filled her eyes. When she returned, shortly after, he had gone, without supper and leaving his lunch basket on the table.

The next morning she began an early watch for him, and when the usual hour for his returning had passed without a sight of him, she began to grow distressed, for though he had been faithful and regular for a number of weeks, there was always the haunting fear, not far removed from her heart, that roused itself to life when the boy was long absent.

She had intended to go to Nellie's funeral, but as the hours passed without bringing Horace, her neighbor's trouble sank into a second place beside the great fear that wrenched her heart. Well she knew that one more offense such as he had before committed would forever remove the name of Horace Russel from the pay roll of the company for which he worked, and start him squarely upon the highway to ruin.

While the funeral procession formed in front of Deacon Grey's house she stayed indoors, but when it had passed down the shaded road she again took her stand at the gate with her sad eyes turned in the direction of Trentwood.

Before she caught sight of the rapidly approaching vehicle, the insane crying of her son caught her ear and drove with its first quiver pain like a knife into the unhealed heart wound. With all her might she called him as he drove past, and wild-eyed she watched his flight, pressing her hands to her ears to

keep out the sounds that were borne back on the still air. But he swept by without even a look toward her and out of sight down the road in a cloud of dust.

As soon as darkness fell she prepared to go again to Trentwood, and this time she carried a pistol hidden in the bosom of her dress, fully determined to shoot Jacob Crane should she find that he had broken his promise.

As on that other night she took the railroad track. As before, she paused a moment in passing the station to peep in the window, and as then she saw a stranger sitting in the place where Horace had been accustomed to sit at night. With rapid steps she hurried across the street and entered the saloon.

"Have you sold my boy any more liquor?" she demanded, approaching Jacob Crane, who was dealing out drinks to a couple of beardless boys.

"Who are you, madam—who is your boy?" he inquired.

"I am the mother of Horace Russel—Horace is my boy and you promised before God that you would not sell him any more liquor! I told you if you did he would lose his place—and that if he lost it——"

"Has he lost his place?" Crane interrupted with a show of interest.

"My God! I hope not!" she almost screamed. "But someone has been selling him liquor! Was it you?"

Jacob Crane shot a swift glance at the bar-tender.

"I have not, madam," he said smoothly. "I promised I would not and I always keep a promise made to a woman."

"Somebody has sold my boy—my poor boy, more liquor! O God, how could anybody be so cruel—but somebody is—somebody has—and he got it here before!"

"Bob," said Jacob Crane sternly, addressing his

bar-tender, "have you sold this woman's boy any more liquor?"

"Not a drop, sir," was the prompt reply.

"Not a drop, madam," Crane repeated blandly. "We have kept our promise. We are running a respectable place here."

"Somebody has!" Mrs. Russel exclaimed wildly.

"Very sorry," he answered shortly, turning to mix a drink for a thinly clad old man.

With her hand still clutching the pistol, Mrs. Russel started back to Maple Crossing, and as she went her lonely way she stopped often to call "Horace! Horace!" the fields and wooded patches along the way echoing the words softly.

Upon reaching home she went to the bed where she had on a previous occasion found Horace sleeping, but he was not there, neither was he in his room, but during the night she kept up a tireless tramping between the two beds, as if expecting each time to find him in one or the other of them.

With the morning came Horace, his eyes marked with heavy rings and an expression on his face that needed no words. But his mother did not seem to realize the blow.

"Never mind, little boy!" she said soothingly when he dropped his head on the table with a groan. "Never mind. Stay here with me—your mother will take care of you," and she seemed happy to have him near her.

Worn and disheartened Horace soon went to his room and dropped into a heavy sleep. When he finally awoke the room was dark, and he knew that his sleep had lasted through the day and into the night. What time it was he did not know, but while he lay awake someone entered the room and approached his bedside softly. He could distinguish nothing with his eye, but he was sure that some person stood near. He felt that this person presently bent over him, and then he felt a quick breath strik

ing gently on his face. With a great sense of fear he lay perfectly quiet, and after a few seconds the breathing in his face ceased. A second later and retreating footsteps sounded.

Raising himself to his elbow Horace stared into the darkness toward the dim square of gray that marked the window, and as he looked a figure passed casting a dark image against the dim light.

"Mother!" Horace called softly, but there was no answer.

"Mother," he repeated, "is it you?"

Still there was no response, but the figure recrossed the room, casting its dim image across the gray square as it approached the bed. Horace dropped back on the pillow, and the next moment he felt the soft breath again blowing in his face. Then a hand was passed over his face, feeling its way from the chin up.

"Yes, he's here—he's safe, poor little boy!" and the hand caressed his forehead and brushed back his hair.

Horace was now satisfied that it was his mother, but her movements puzzled him, and again he spoke her name.

"Mother, mother, is it you?" he questioned.

She laughed, a low, gentle laugh. "That's my little boy," she said, as if talking to some unseen person. "He's a good boy—a dear, good boy! He'll make his mother happy yet!"

Horace tried to lift himself, but she pushed him back with savage force.

"No, no!" she said excitedly. "You must not get away from mother. He's after you—the saloon—the state—the saloon!" and she paused as if uncertain, then added sharply, "it's after you!"

Horace dropped back on the pillow and a moment later his mother again crossed the room. Before she returned Horace slipped out of bed and

sought for his clothing, for he was certain that his mother must be ill.

While he was hastily dressing she returned and bent over the bed, and instantly a wild scream startled him into a cold perspiration.

"Horace, Horace!" the wild voice cried. "Has it got you—has it got you?"

The frightened boy sprang to his mother's side and threw his arm around her saying, "Mother, here I am—here I am!"

"Give me back my boy!" she cried, clutching him in a grasp of iron. "Give me back my boy!"

"Let me light a lamp," he said desperately.

"Give me back my boy!" she continued to cry, tightening her grasp.

"Feel of my face!" Horace entreated, catching up her hand.

Eagerly she ran her fingers over his face; tenderly she brushed his hair; then she laughed a low satisfied laugh and kissed him.

"Yes, it's Horace—my boy. Go to bed, little boy!" And leading him to the bed she tucked him in as deftly as if it had been midday, and then with a last lingering kiss she left him in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LAST VISIT TO CRANE'S

For a few days Horace remained at home, but he was restless and uneasy, and finally, one morning, started away to Trentwood, presumably to look for work.

Supper time came and he had not returned, and Mrs. Russel again prepared to go to Trentwood to search for him. As soon as the long summer twilight had turned to darkness she set out, down the track, as usual.

As before, she paused and peered into the station window, with the forlorn hope that she might see Horace in his old place, but the form of the stranger met her anxious gaze and she hurried across the street to Crane's place.

Pausing at the screen, she opened a narrow crack and peered earnestly at the crowd of boys and men that stood around the bar smoking and delivering themselves of stories adapted to the moral atmosphere of the saloon.

The air was dense with smoke and the babel was distracting to her over-wrought nerves, but something that she saw suddenly drove all other thoughts from her troubled mind, for Jacob Crane was leaning over the bar holding out a glass, and the hand that reached for it was the hand of her son.

As he lifted the liquor to his lips his face was plainly visible, and with a wild scream Mrs. Russel sprang into the place. Seizing the glass from the boy's trembling hand, she dashed it to the floor. Then with the frantic motion of an enraged tiger she

caught up glass after glass and bottle after bottle, throwing them in mad haste upon the floor, which was soon running with liquor.

"Mother! Mother!" Horace cried, catching her arm. But she shook him roughly off and reached for other bottles that the bar-tender was hurriedly putting beyond her reach, while Jacob Crane seized her uplifted arm.

"Hands off, you liar! You swore before Almighty God that you would not sell my boy any more liquor, and I have caught you in the act—I have caught you in the act! Stand back!" and she flung him aside with such force that he staggered against the bar.

"You are crazy!" he roared.

"Is a mother crazy because she would save her boy?" she shouted as the company in the room gathered around.

"You are killing me! You are killing my boy! You are killing us all! You are damning us! Am I crazy to object?" she almost shrieked.

"Keep still now, or I'll have you put in the lock-up!" Crane said hotly. "You've smashed a dozen of my glasses and four quarts of whisky, for which your precious son shall pay!"

"And I'm here to smash all the rest!" she exclaimed, turning again to the bar. "I'm here to clean this place out of existence—God help me, it's the only way it can be done, for you are a liar—a robber—a murderer!"

"And so you have come here to stop my business?" said Crane sneeringly, stepping before her and blocking the way with his portly person. "You here—YOU, to stop my business? Woman, you are a fool!" and he laughed coarsely.

"Strike me and the state will strike back at you, for my interests are protected by the state. I have bought from the state the right to run this business, call it or me what you may. I have bought the pro-

tection of the state no matter what that protection makes secure!"

Mrs. Russel stared at him inquiringly.

"Do you understand?" he inquired with rising tones.

"Understand?" she repeated in a dazed way. "No I do not understand. Why does the state wish to kill my boy?"

The look of scorn deepened on the face of the rum-seller.

"YOUR boy!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "Every mother in America thinks the saloon has been devised especially to trap *her* darling. Madam," and he raised his finger stiffly, "the state has not heard of your boy. In this country boys are as common as pig tracks. If boys are necessary to keep my business running, what of it? They are only incidentals. The state does not count *boys*. The state is interested in DOLLARS—and the dollars I pay."

Horace stepped to her side and spoke to her.

"Poor little boy!" she said, looking lovingly into his face. "Poor little boy!"

Then she turned again to Crane. "Let me finish," she said hurriedly. "You have lied to me—there is no other way," and she started behind the bar.

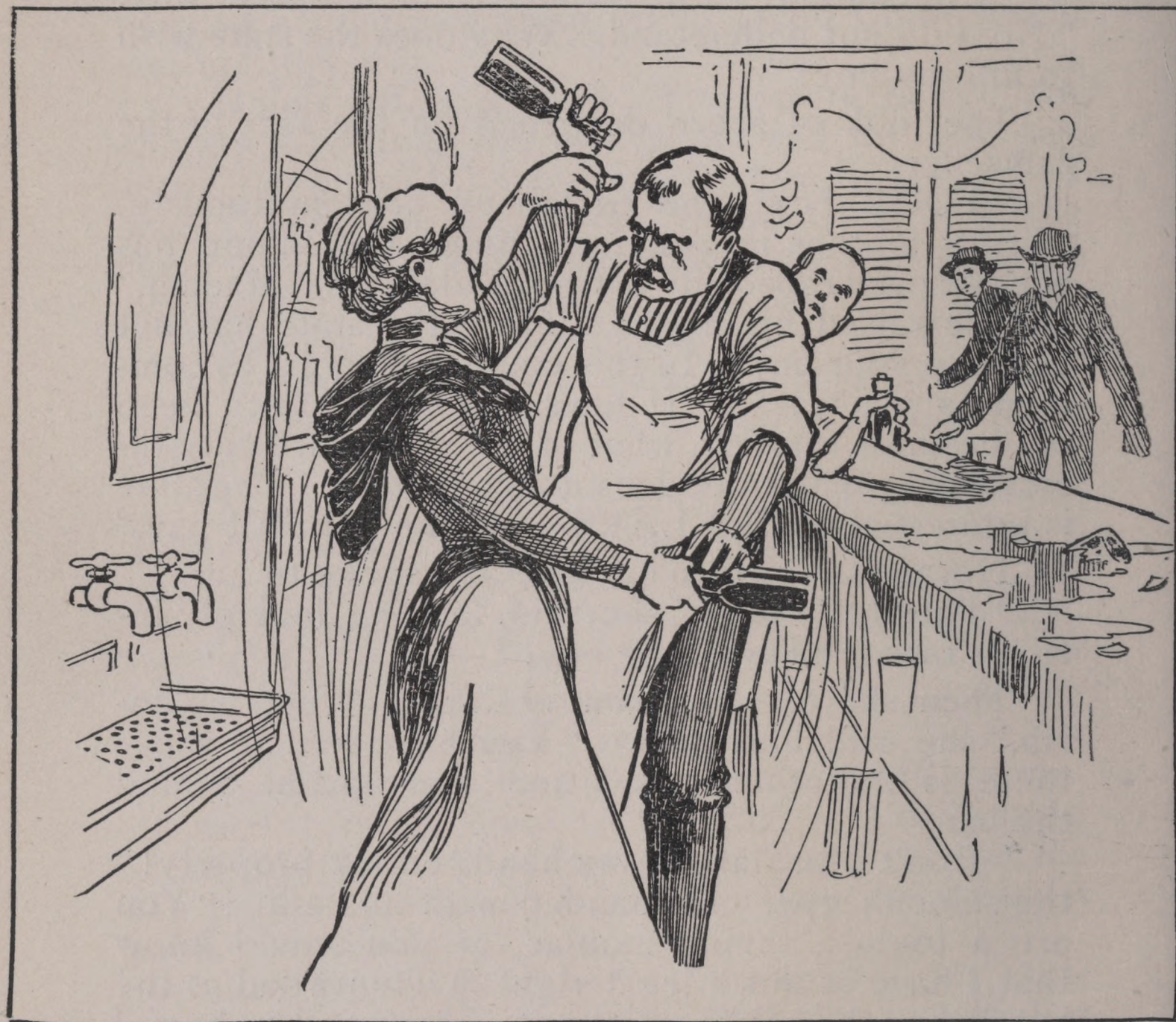
"Don't you dare to lay hands on my property!" the saloonkeeper commanded with an oath. "You are a fool—a raving maniac, or you would know that I have as much legal right in Trentwood as the butcher or the baker. Get out of here and go home! I am here to sell liquor to any one and every one who can pay for it."

"To Horace—to *my* boy?"

"Yes, to your boy. That's what I'm here for, and if you don't want your little boy to drink in my place, keep him home with you and make a little girl out of him. Go on now!" and the genial pro-

prietor of Crane's Place, transformed into his true character, pointed threateningly toward the door.

For a moment Mrs. Russel stood gazing into the face of the brutal man. Then she said, "Yes, yes; I'll keep him home with me. Come Horace!" and she turned to where he had been standing only to



"YOU ARE A FOOL—A RAVING MANIAC!"

find that he had gone.

"Horace! Horace!" she cried in tones that cut the air.

"He's started for home," Crane said. "You will overtake him if you hurry."

Without so much as casting another glance around the room, Mrs. Russel made a hasty exit, and some moments after she had gone Horace returned to get a last drink, but he became interested in a game that happened to be taking place and stayed to see the end.

This game was one strictly prohibited by law, but what cares that most anarchistic of all modern institutions, the legalized saloon, for law? The law says to it "Thou shalt not sell to minors," and the saloon sells to minors. The law says, "Thou shalt not sell to drunkards," and the saloon sells to drunkards. The law says, "Thou shalt not sell after midnight," and the saloon sells after midnight. The law says, "Thou shalt not sell on Sunday," and the saloon sells on Sunday.

As the game increased in interest, the passions of the players rose to a fever heat, that appeared in the sinister gleam of the contracted eye and the nervous clutch of the fingers around the cards; and when the last chance had been taken and the winnings swept up by the winning hand, a difficulty arose which culminated in a fight in which three men rolled in the saw dust like dogs in a pit, and swore and clutched and grappled and panted, while the crowd closed in around them and Jacob Crane made frantic efforts to quell the fight.

But his efforts were ineffectual. A mortal scream sounded above the din, and one of the combatants loosened his grasp and rolled into a pool of blood that spurted from a knife wound. Still the fight continued, until a moment later another deadly cry rang out and a second man fell gasping and struggling.

By this time the police of Trentwood were upon the scene and succeeded in arresting a number of those in the barroom and among them Horace, who was either intoxicated or too spellbound by the horror of the tragedy to make his escape.

* * *

When Mrs. Russel left Jacob Crane's place she hurried her steps thinking to overtake Horace. This time she took the roadway home, and once having left the limits of Trentwood, the houses along the way were closed and dark, as the hour was growing late.

Along the roadside, clumps of trees threw dense shadows and into each spot of shadow she hurried, hoping to find Horace, and calling as she went, "Horace! Horace!" After passing out of each shadowy place she paused to look back as if to be certain that she was not leaving him and then again rushed on, crying in agony for her boy.

She was not long in reaching Maple Crossing; and all but exhausted with her fruitless pursuit, she hurried into the house and to Dot's bed.

Not finding Horace there she hastened to his room. His bed was empty also, but she bent over it and passed her hands across the pillow as she had done the night before.

A moment only she caressed the pillow, then with a wild cry she sped out the door and down the street; and at midnight the peaceful hamlet of Maple Crossing was aroused by a woman screaming in an agony of heart torture, "Horace! Horace!"

Doors and windows were thrown open, and well knowing who the woman must be, a number of neighbors, among them Deacon Grey and the young minister, started in pursuit.

As they followed the fleeing woman her voice rang back on the still air, crying always "Horace! Horace! Has it got you, Horace?" When they finally came in sight of her she was speeding down the middle of the road like a dark spirit, her slender figure showing indistinctly in the waning moonlight and her thin hair blowing back on the night breeze. When she had been overtaken, all efforts to soothe her proved vain. Her one word was "Horace!"

Her eyes looked for but one sight and that was the face of her boy.

"God pity!" Deacon Grey groaned, as her incessant crying pulsed on the night air.

"The silent partner in this robbery of reason will now take charge of the victim and, like the monstrous whited sepulcher of justice that it is, declare itself merciful," said William Bruce with a shudder.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VICTIM'S PLEA

While preparations were being made for the removal of his mother to the insane asylum near Adkins, Horace in his cell was recovering from the effects of the liquor he had drunk the night before. With something of an effort he tried to recall the events of the night.

His recollection of the fight was dreamy and far away—a vague impression of a battle in which vast numbers were engaged while the world revolved rapidly. How the trouble had come about, or what part he had taken in it he could not determine, but the fact that he found himself in a cell was of itself evidence that he had been among the number in the struggle.

The events of the earlier part of the evening were clear enough in his mind, and shame and sorrow cut him to the heart when he thought of the part he had played in evading his mother. Her wild and excited manner and words, so different from her usual gentle ways, worried him, and he determined to hasten to her as soon as possible, and in the meantime to send some reassuring word.

The opportunity for doing this seemed to present itself when the jailor announced to Horace that a friend from Maple Crossing wished to speak to him.

Looking up the prisoner met the kindly face of the Rev. William Bruce, who greeted him cordially.

“I am the new minister in your town,” he said by

way of introduction. "Not long ago I was your age and I have not forgotten what it is for a boy to need a friend. What can I do for you? Do not hesitate to mention it."

"Will you take a message to my mother?" Horace inquired eagerly. "She has not been well these last few days, and I treated her badly last night. Tell her for me that I am sorry. Tell her not to worry. She will not be glad to know that I am here, but she will be relieved to know that, for a time at least, I am safe from Crane's place."

"When I see your mother I will gladly give her your message," the minister said, "but I expect to remain in Trentwood until this afternoon when your case will be given a hearing. It will give you confidence to know that friends are with you."

"Thank you," Horace answered earnestly. "But do you think you can send word to my mother not to come this afternoon?" There was a look of deep anxiety in his eyes. "Poor mother! It would be like her to come, and I am sure she could not control herself."

"She will not come," the minister assured him, "I am quite sure she will not."

A moment Horace stood before his new friend, separated only by the bars, then he covered his face with his hands and a slight tremor passed over his body.

"Keep a brave heart Horace." William Bruce said cheerfully. "A long stretch of useful life lies all before you yet, if God pleases."

After the minister had gone Horace sat in deep study for some time, but at last a new thought seemed to have come to him. His mouth took on its natural firmness and a new light shone in his eyes.

The expression on his face was not one of pleasure, rather the portrayal of the relief one experiences when a difficult task has been finally decided upon.

In the afternoon the courtroom was crowded and among the number Horace noticed several who had been in the barroom the night before. After a short examination the murderers were positively identified, and the others of the number were held to answer to the charge of disturbing the peace. Before the fines were assessed, each was given a chance to speak; one after another of the sons of Trentwood pleaded each his case and paid his fine.

While they spoke Horace listened, evidently agitated, but his face, though pale, never showed more determination, and when his name was called he promptly arose and faced the judge.

"Your Honor," he said firmly, "I stand before you charged with the crime of disturbing the public peace, and because you sit to-day the representative of the law, I am going to state my case and throw myself entirely on your mercy. I am a free born American, having yet three months to live before reaching the years of my majority. My father passed from this world leaving me for an inheritance a will which has been my pride, and in the lawful exercise of which has been my only hope, and an equally strong appetite which, if allowed to take the course of its tendency, means my sure destruction. Ignorant of the fire that lay sleeping in my best blood I pushed back the tide of difficulties that has continually gathered across my path since the day I first determined to make for myself a name and a place in the world; and though I have fought against such odds as have taken my life's best energy, I have seen environments shaped to suit my plans until at last I found myself in a position to help myself and those depending on me into a new and happier life. The light came to my mother's eyes—eyes that had long been misty with unshed tears and dull for lack of hope. Smiles came to the face of a child whose birthright has been clouded by the heavy curse of liquor, whose hands have ever been thin for the lack

of proper food. Meantime the other inheritance slept—rousing now and then in such a way as not fully to reveal itself.

“While the lives that hung on my course were growing happier, even then, the destruction of us all was being planned, and we knew it when Crane’s place opened its doors across the corner from the station where I worked. If a hollow-eyed skull and gleaming cross-bones had been painted on every square foot of front surface, if dense darkness had shrouded the spot, only broken at long intervals by a bit of lurid glare, if the wails of the dammed had issued from that place as incessantly as they issue from the hearts and souls of its victims, and if the stench of millions of dead had issued unbroken by a fresh breath from its doors, I should never have entered the door under the sign ‘Crane’s Place.’ But the skillful blending of many tints and colors with the flash of mirrors and the glitter of glass was arrayed to please the eye. The darkness of the outer world was dispelled by a myriad of radiant lights. The strains of music mingled with the babble of men’s voices was intended to catch the ear, while the scent of mixed liquor hung temptingly on the air.

“Born under the curse—having lived under the curse, still I did not recognize the curse. I saw the most influential, the most respectable men of Trentwood going into Crane’s place, and I, too, went to see for myself what that modern institution called a saloon is like.

“Then it was I took my first drink which was no sooner swallowed than it fanned the sleeping fire in my running blood into a flame—bewildering—dizzying—delightful—cursed

“After trying three times to meet my enemy on his own ground and conquer by my will, I found myself defeated. There remained nothing to do but play the part of a coward and dodge the saloon, and though it humiliated me, I closed my hand over my

nose in passing to keep back the scent that seemed with invisible arms to draw me in. I steeled my ears against the music that like a siren's voice seemed bewitching me to the shoals of my own destruction. I passed behind it.

"If this, my mortal enemy, had been some foe in heavy armour, some hitherto unconquered giant, some hydra with a hundred deadly heads, if it had been any thing on God's earth besides a thing made legal by the sovereign state, I should have taken my life in my hands and delighted to fight the monster to victory or death for honor's sake. But it was nothing I could meet in open battle. I could not fight it. I could not harm it by so much as a hair's weight of harm, for behind it, calm, majestic, powerful, stands the law—the power of the state itself. I would not willingly disturb the peace of any man. If I have done so, I have done so wholly without intention on my part—this I insist. I therefore do not plead guilty of disturbing the public peace, but I plead guilty of utter failure to meet my enemy or to elude it. I plead guilty of being unable to match my will against that of other inheritance and win the fight. I plead guilty—I am going to plead guilty to any charge that will put me in the state's prison for five years. Do not think I have not weighed the matter. I know the shame of it. I know the pain of it. But I have counted the cost. Name the crime, your honor, that will put me for five years in a cell—name it, and I plead guilty!

"I am of sound mind, the insane asylum will not protect me. I am of healthy body, the poor house can not be my home. I am of older years than those taken in charge by the reform school, but the state owes it to me that I be protected from what I have not been able to protect myself from. If the state must, for the sake of revenue, license the saloon; if the state's attitude to me must be without mercy up to this present time—be merciful now! Save me

from the saloon! Give me five years—five years, your honor, in which to grow strong again! Five years of safety! Let me be shut away from all the world—give me another chance! Give me five years! I am pleading for the state to show me mercy. I want a chance to be strong. I want to be beyond the reach of the open saloon. For the sake of my mother's bleeding heart—for the sake of my sister's pleading eyes—for the sake of my future—for the sake of her who sleeps——."

His clear voice came to a sudden pause. His eyes which had been resting beseechingly on the face of the judge were suddenly overcast with tears. His fingers trembled against each other and he sat down.

Stillness reigned in the court room, only to be broken by the judge, who used his handkerchief vindictively. But while he was visably affected, he was there to deal out mercy only as directed by law, and though he talked in a fatherly way, commending Horace for the brave fight he had made and advising him to shun the saloon as he would the pest, he assured him that the state makes no provision for the protection of its boys until they have so far become victims of its own legalized traffic as to have committed some grave offense.

Horace was not to be taken in charge by the state. The power into whose trap the boy had fallen refused to give him help, though in the agony of a last hope he pleaded for it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"GOOD - BY, HORACE "

After Horace had made his ineffectual plea to the state for help, his fine was paid by Deacon Grey and he was taken in charge by the Rev. William Bruce, who was waiting to take him home to Maple Crossing. The light that had shone in the boy's eyes and the emotion that had forced his words while he had spoken had gone, leaving his face wan and worn and his hands nerveless.

"I hoped," he said wearily, "that the state would listen to my plea. I know it was unusual—wild perhaps—but it was my last hope," and a long sigh followed the words.

"You are too young and brave to speak of a 'last hope,'" the minister said cheerfully. "That the state does not protect its weak members, but on the other hand makes legal the power that curses their existence, is the crime of the age and will cause the ultimate undoing of the state itself if persisted in, but you have by no means passed the pale of hope. The way to victory has been half traveled when a man discovers his need. If you have learned your weakness, get strength from God. In your own strength you may not fight this fight with a shadow of a chance of winning, but with the strength that comes from above a man can meet any power or force and come off more than conqueror. You are a young man with a will. I have heard it spoken of. Assert this will—this magnificent will—in God's name."

"My will!" Horace exclaimed bitterly. "Ah, yes, I have a will, but do you know it tears the life out of a fellow to be made the fighting ground of a will like iron and a something in him equally strong and hot and fiercer than wolves' teeth. While the fight between the two invisible powers lasts my very existence is torn and scattered in hell, and rather than live in hell an hour a man will call his will off and let the other have the right of way. I've tried it over and over. For fame—for honor—for love have I made the fight. I can only conquer by playing coward and running from my enemy, the saloon. I intend to rest a few days with my mother; then I shall set out and search the world for a spot where the power that has cursed my life may not follow me."

They drove a short distance in silence, then the young minister told Horace the disappointing news that he would not find his mother at their home.

Other than one sharp exclamation, Horace gave no evidence of sorrow, pressing his thin lips tightly as the minister briefly and without the unpleasant features told the boy how his mother had been taken in charge by the public officials.

"My mother is insane," he said as if to himself, when the minister had finished, "and I am to blame."

"Not all to blame," William Bruce answered, "but if your conduct has been in any way responsible for your mother's mental condition, your conduct and yours alone will be able to restore her to her natural self."

"And for this I must make another effort though it kills me," and the words were followed with a sigh that spoke more plainly than words of the hopelessness of the task.

"I am returning to an empty house—and a fresh grave," Horace said, as he alighted from the buggy; and the minister drove away understanding now why Horace had so abruptly ended his talk to the judge.

As the sore-wounded boy slowly approached the dilapidated house, Dot suddenly appeared and rushed toward him holding out her hands.

"Horace! Horace!" she cried, flinging herself into his arms, "they carried mother away this morning and they're coming back to get me. Don't let them get me! Don't! Don't!" and she burst into sobs.

With the child clinging frantically to him, Horace entered the silent house, took his little sister in his arms and wiped the tears from her pale cheeks.

"Don't be afraid, Dottie," he said, smoothing back her soft hair, "I have come home to take good care of you."

"But they are coming to-morrow," and she shuddered.

"No, no, Dottie," he answered reassuringly, "they will not take you," and after repeated assurances, which Horace gave in good faith, the child grew more confident.

"Horace," she said after an interval of silence, "why does nothing nice last long? We've had our doughnuts and our steak and gravy—but it didn't last long. We had our happy days when mother laughed and the sunshine shone in her eyes, but it didn't last long. And we've had the days when we heard Nellie singing——."

Dottie," Horace interrupted, "don't talk of Nellie—nor of mother."

"Why?" she questioned with interest.

"Because—because—I'll tell you some other time," and Horace raised his hand to his eye to dash aside the hot tears.

"All right," she said, "but why didn't you come to mother when she called?"

"Did she call me?"

"Over and over she called 'Horace, Horace,' until everybody put their hands over their ears—some put their hands over their eyes."

"I did not hear her."

"I don't see why. For hours and hours I heard her calling—calling—calling."

"I wish I were dead!" he suddenly exclaimed with pain.

"Horace—Horace, don't wish it!" Dot begged, putting her two little hands under his chin pleadingly. "It might come true, then I would be left alone and I'd die. Be a doctor, Horace—a wise, good doctor, and take care of me as you always said you would. Will you?"

"I'll try."

"You never used to say 'try,'" she said thoughtfully. "You always acted proud and said 'I will.'"

"That was before——"

"Before what?"

"Before I had learned what it means to live and fight and lose!" was the bitter answer."

Dot did not understand his mood, but she settled into his arms as if within their frail embrace no harm could reach her, but her mind was not wholly at rest, and even while she slept that night she reached repeatedly for her brother's hand, clinging to it with all her force.

Early the next morning an officer from the Orphans' Home in Adkins appeared in Maple Crossing with a conveyance and announced to Horace that he had come for Dot.

The terrified child clung to her brother, wild-eyed and trembling, praying him not to let her be taken. But it was in vain that Horace pleaded his ability to care for the child. He was a minor, without a position or a prospect, and although the child's pleas moved the hearts of all who heard her, there was nothing, at least for the present but to let her be taken.

When Horace became assured that she must go, he took her into the old home and holding her close against his heart whispered words of comfort and cheer.

"Go with them," he said. "They will be good to a little girl like you. You will have plenty to eat and other little girls to play with. I will send you a box with nice things in it—candy and perhaps a pretty doll, and soon I will come after you. Be watching for me, Dottie. I will come——"

"But I will be away from you and mother," she moaned. "Who will hear me say my prayers? Who will hold me when it's dark? Who will love me? Oh, Horace, I'm afraid—I'm afraid!"

Closer he drew her in his arms and dropping his face against her soft hair, for a moment he let the hot tears that were burning his eyes fall without check.

Then he spoke bravely and cheerfully.

"Be a brave girl, Dottie—for mother and for me. I will surely come and bring you home. Don't forget to watch!"

While Horace had been trying to calm Dot, Deacon Grey's housekeeper had been collecting the child's scanty wardrobe, and when it had been gathered she called Horace to bring his little sister.

The child's face was pale, her eyes were bright with tears, but she was trying with all her might to be brave, though her lips trembled and she clutched her brother's hand frantically.

As they passed out the door, the kitten rubbed against Dot's feet, and a look of pleasure lighted her tear-stained face.

"You may take it, Dottie," Horace said, and she eagerly lifted the kitten and cuddled it in her arms; but when Horace went to lift her into the conveyance, the driver who stood by said, "Leave the cat."

"Let her take it," pleaded Horace.

"I'd like to," the man answered kindly, "but it's all the state can do to care for humans without their cats," and Dot obediently opened her arms and let the little pet down upon the ground.

A moment she clung tightly to her brother's neck,

then with a stifled sob she relaxed her hold and let him place her on the seat.

"Good-by, Horace," she said bravely, though her lips trembled. "Good-by, Horace."

But scarcely had the driver touched his whip to the horse when the child's fortitude forsook her, and turning back she reached her arms toward her brother, crying in childish agony, "Horace—Horace—good-by, Horace!"



A MOMENT SHE CLUNG TIGHTLY TO HER BROTHER'S
NECK

CHAPTER XIX.

"IN THE END THEREOF."

With the frantic cry of little Dot still ringing in his ear Horace returned to the deserted house, and taking a chair to the pantry mounted it and began a rapid search on a top shelf.

At last his fingers came in contact with something that stopped the search, and drawing from underneath a pile of accumulated stuff an old pistol he went into the outer room to examine it.

Evidently it was not in good condition, and sitting down he began eagerly to prepare it for use.

While he sat thus engaged the door softly opened and the minister entered.

"It's no earthly use for me to try again," the boy said, by way of explanation of his employment. "If I could find a place where there is no saloon I would, but I tell you it's no use for me to either fight or dodge with a saloon across the street from me. Don't talk."

"If you mean what you say," said the preacher, "if you really mean that you would like to take another start where there is no saloon, why not stay here in Maple Crossing for a time? There is no saloon here and probably there never will be."

"There was never one in Trentwood until I went there, and then, as if Satan himself had been on my track, Crane set his place where I must pass it—see it—smell it—hear it every minute. And if I should stay in Maple Crossing no sooner would I get myself together and started on the upgrade than a saloon would open on the corner. If you do not want a

saloon in Maple Crossing do not keep me here. I tell you the saloon is on my track with the scent of a hound and the certainty of death."

"You are right; the saloon is on your track, and the track of every other American boy; still I hardly think there will ever be a saloon in this peaceful place. Deacon Grey tells me he needs a young man in the store. He is your friend, and a sturdy one he will prove, if you will let him. Besides I need some young fellow to help me study, for I study yet and have many books. A number of my books are medical works given me by an uncle who hoped I would some day be a physician. These you may use."

"Don't tempt me so!" Horace exclaimed, and with a quick movement he raised the pistol toward his head.

The minister sprang forward, and snatching the weapon from the hand of the boy threw it through the open door with all his force.

"It was not loaded," Horace said with a forced laugh which ended in a shudder. "I was only screwing my courage up to the sticking point."

"It's a thousand pities I was ever born," he went on bitterly, "a thousand pities that I was not shot instead of—Nellie. Nellie would have been a blessing to earth. Nellie——."

The minister waited for him to finish his sentence, then he said: "Nellie would have you be a man. You are going home with me to-night. Your nerves have been taxed past the limit of endurance. You need rest. When you have rested we will talk the matter over. You shall yet be the blessing to the world that God intends you to be, and I shall be happy to be your right hand man in the fight you are to make for honor's sake—and the sake of those you love."

A moment Horace sat looking out the open door: Then with a low cry, like that of a wounded animal, crushed and all but dead, he threw himself on the

floor at the young minister's knees, and caught his hand in a feverish grasp.

"Help me! Help me, and I will try again!" he cried. "I will do anything—anything—if you will only help me to be strong once more! For God's sake help me—I only need a little help!"

Horace was trembling violently.

William Bruce rested his hand on the boy's shoulder and said in a husky voice: "God is my witness; I will help you. You shall go home with me. My home shall be your home. My mother shall take your mother's place, and my strength shall be freely spent for you till you grow strong. But you must promise not to go to Trentwood. You must stay in the store each day and study with me at night. Then when you are strong once more, the way will open for your mother, perhaps, and little Dot to come back home. Now let us ask God's blessing on the fight we are to make."

They knelt side by side and then they passed from the house and down the street. Under the bowed trees Horace turned and stood for a moment looking from the gate of his deserted home to that of Deacon Grey. As he stood, a mist rose to his eyes, and through it he saw a sunny faced girl smiling after him, and as he looked into her happy face she raised her hand and waved it calling, as she had called that day only such a little while ago: "Good by, Horace—be good while I'm away!"

So clearly sounded the words that involuntarily he lifted his hand as if to beckon to the speaker, but dropped it suddenly. The place on the porch was vacant.

All that night Horace tossed upon his bed and groaned, calling for his mother and Dot, and when morning came he still talked and tossed. A physician was summoned and found a patient seriously ill with fever.

The illness was protracted. The boy, whose

strength had never been great, had completely exhausted his force of energy by years of hard study and overwork, and later by his misconduct, and for weeks he lay in a condition which made his recovery seem impossible.

In his delirium he seemed to be a child walking in a boundless meadow with a companion. Sometimes he would tighten his hot fingers around the minister's hand saying: "How swift it runs. It is angry. It wants to carry us away! Come, Nellie." He was standing in memory by the brook where they had played in childhood. Then they wandered in some grassy spot, and he was telling his companion that the stars had dropped from the dark night sky into the meadow grass. Then they were listening to the whispers of the mysterious creatures that called to them from some thicket.

But always he held fast to the imaginary child's hand, and tears often came to the minister's eyes, for, though he did not understand it all, he knew that the boy was wandering in some happy dream land that had forever gone.

But, after days of delirium, the fever burned itself out and the patient lived again in the real world.

* * * * *

But while Horace had been shut in the minister's house a terrible agitation had been shaking Maple Crossing, for Jacob Crane had set his greedy eye on the little village, and had decided that a saloon could be made a paying business on the corner opposite Deacon Grey's store.

When this report first gained circulation it fell upon the pious ears of the citizens of Maple Crossing without causing a ripple of anxiety, so secure did they feel; but after Deacon Grey had investigated the matter and found the report all too true the indignation ran high, for the flowers had hardly faded on Nellie's grave, and the words the minister had

spoken over her coffin still sounded in many ears.

A meeting was called in the old church, and Deacon Grey made the most impassioned speech of his life. He had many times declared in prayer meeting that sooner than see a saloon in Maple Crossing he would tear it down with his own hands, and the people who listened to him now were not disappointed in expecting violent opposition.

Not only did he speak, but he circulated the petition of remonstrance provided for by law. Inside the limits of Maple Crossing it received many signatures, but in the county outside the farmers who had had no daughters shot in Adkins held to the opinion that a saloon in Maple Crossing would make business better, and so it happened that after the agitation and indignation there came a night when a company from Trentwood, including a negro band, came into the quiet village and formally opened a saloon.

Deacon Grey felt that he had been personally outraged, but though his fingers itched to tear the new saloon down, though his hands trembled with a desire to smash windows and screens, he did not dare to lift his arm, for behind the bar there hung a paper which was the certificate of the sovereign state's protection.

* * * * *

While all this had been going on, Horace had been mending slowly. The light had come back into his clear, dark eyes, showing that the fire of determination had been rekindled, and the old expression of deep set resolution marked his face. Hope was reviving, and again he was building plans for the future. Not such plans as he had once made—for the voice of his wise and gentle counsellor had been forever hushed, and the plans he must make were sadly incomplete without Nellie in his vision of the future. Neither could he speak his plans to his mother and watch her sad face light up with

fresh hope and new joy. Outraged, defrauded, robbed of her reason, in a distant place she was crying constantly, in a voice that was never weary and with pain that never ceased, "Horace! Horace!"

Neither could he whisper his plans to Dot and make her happy by telling her of the joy that lay in store for her. Dot, too, had been robbed of her childish heritage, and in a strange place cried herself to sleep whispering her mother's name and in the darkness reaching her hands to her brother.

Still, Horace made his plans, plans for the noble manhood that he intended yet should be, for Nellie's and for honor's sake, and the minister helped him. But since Jacob Crane had set his licensed trap in Maple Crossing a sickening fear made the heart of William Bruce heavy.

The way from the minister's house to Deacon Grey's store led across a back street and into the rear entrance, and through this back door Horace entered the store on the morning when he was at last allowed to go to work.

Passing slowly the length of the store, he stopped in the front door, intending to look down the road to his old home—and Nellie's; but his gaze reached no farther than the opposite corner, for there, blazing in the morning sun hung a new sign on which the single word "Saloon" shone in bold letters.

Like one stunned he stood for a moment. Then he drew a long breath and as he did so the old scent struck his nostrils. Turning quickly he hurried to Mr. Grey's desk with a pale face and haunted eyes.

"Am I dreaming?" he exclaimed. "Am I dreaming? For God's sake tell—tell me—do I see my enemy across the street?"

The old man threw his arms around the boy.

"You see your enemy," he answered fiercely, "but before God it shall not harm you. It has robbed me of my daughter, and for her sake, because

she loved you, it shall not harm you. I will fight it with my last dollar—with my last breath!"

Again Horace shuddered as the breeze wafted the faint scent of liquor across the way, even into the store, but after a moment he turned away to busy himself about the store.

Again and again during the morning his employer saw him at the door or window looking, with the air of one who faces a mortal enemy, across the street at the gilded sign, the swinging green doors and the half drawn curtains. Later in the day Horace was missing, and so suddenly and silently had he gone that neither Mr. Grey nor the others employed in the store knew whither. Just as his absence was noted the minister came in, setting aside at once the first supposition that the boy had gone back to his friend's home. A rapid search around the store failed to find him, and a quick visit to the saloon was equally fruitless, and together the two men hurried down the shaded road toward the old Russel home. With eyes keenly searching the street they passed on until, coming opposite the dilapidated house, they saw the son of the ruined home sitting upon the steps of the weatherbeaten porch. His hat lay on the ground and Dot's kitten brushed against his ankle, purring softly. His eyes, wide open, looked out into an open space between the trees, but the light of a descending sun lent them their only brightness.

Bending over him Deacon Grey spoke his name, and, receiving no reply, took up a paper which lay on the ground. He read:

"It is as I told you. The saloon is on my track and the power behind my enemy is the state. Hope dies hard, but it is dead. It is no use for me to try. With the fumes of it always in my nostrils the fight would not last a week. I am going to the one place where it cannot follow me. I have been weak and worthless—but I have tried with all my dying force

to be noble—to be a conqueror. The fight has wearied me. Let me sleep my long sleep beside Nellie. Maybe God—”

The words which had rapidly grown wavering ended there in a long, uneven downward stroke. A pencil lay near the boy's foot on the ground, and beside it an empty bottle.

For a moment the two men stood stricken with surprise and horror. “My God! O my God!” cried Deacon Grey, tears running down his cheeks, while the minister knelt beside the step and pressed his fingers against the boy's white wrist, calling his name pleadingly.

But Horace Russel's brief play on the stage of mortal life had been finished. He had lived, he had loved, he had suffered, he had fought, he had been conquered, he had died—at the mercy of the state.

* * * * *

A wonderful and a horrible thing is committed in the land . . . and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?

(THE END.)

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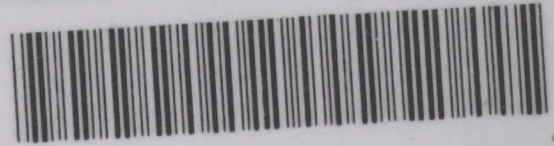
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